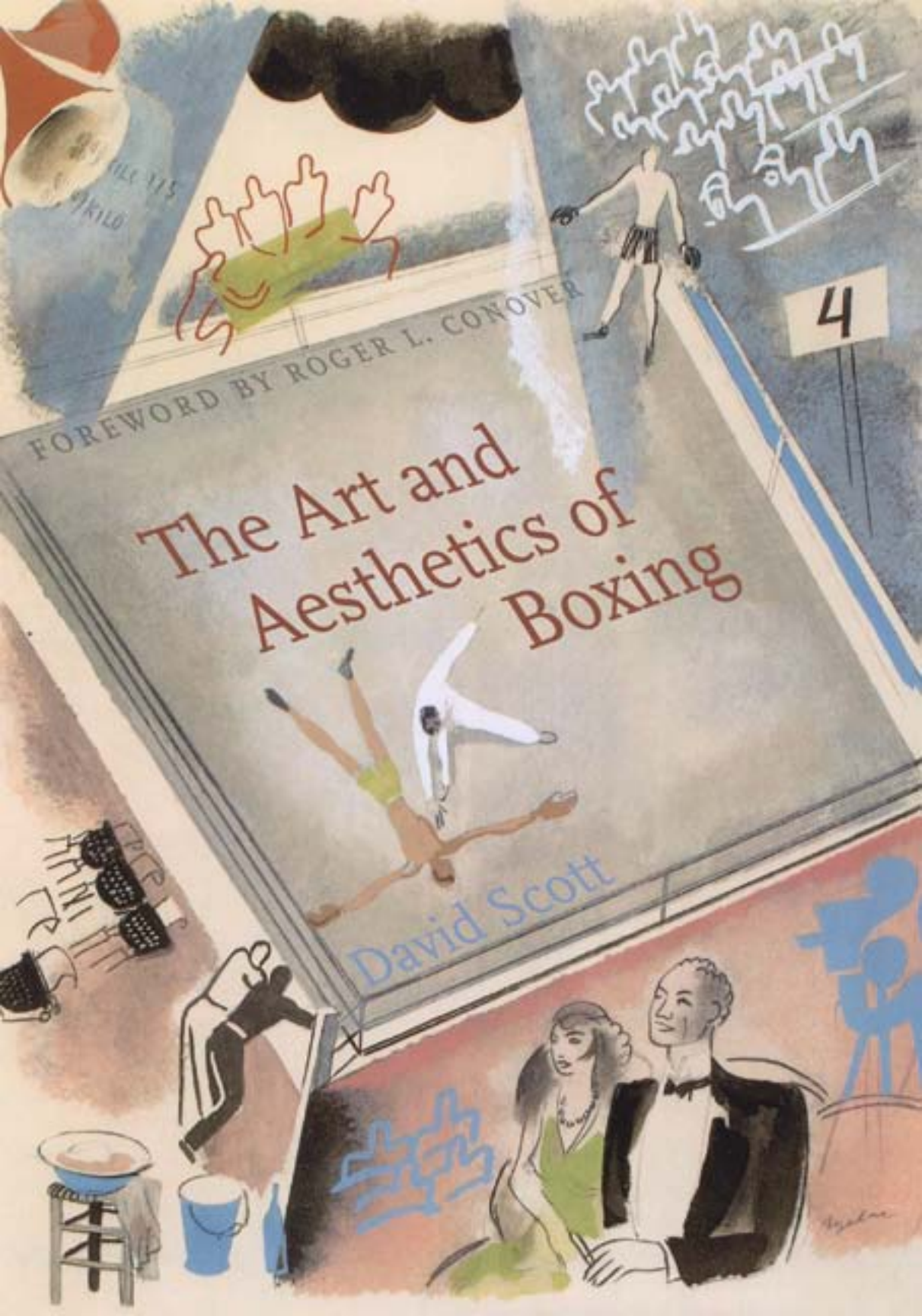




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FOREWORD BY ROGER L. CONOVER

The Art and Aesthetics of Boxing

David Scott

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David Scott

Foreword by Roger L. Conover

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Figure 1. Boxing Club, Trinity College Dublin.
From left to right: Alan Forde, David Scott, Conor Galvin, and Ruaidhrí Breathnach, 2004.
Courtesy Brendan J. Dempsey.

To my formative spar-
ring partners in 2003
and 2004, Alan, Conor,
and Ruaidhrí, a token
of my appreciation. 🌀

To understand the world of boxing you have to explore it personally, to learn the ropes and to live the life of a boxer from the inside. Native understanding is here the necessary condition of an adequate knowledge of the object.

Loïc Wacquant, *Corps et âme*

Boxing tempts writers. It bids them to riff on the contained savagery of the prizefight. It entices them to explore the endeavor in terms of masculinity, race, and class.

James Ellroy, introduction to
F. X. Toole's *Pound for Pound*

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Foreword

All sports involve opposition, to a degree. And all games involve play. But in no sport is illusion as essential a feature of opposition and play as in boxing, where blood-smeared combatants insist on embrace, the wounded strut with cocky stances, and crafty prizefighters feign fatigue, luring adversaries into defenseless positions of prey. The fortunes of fighters turn quickly. A boxer who one second looks spent might rebound with a fatal combination the next. A veteran champion can at any moment walk into a jab and be dethroned by an unranked kid. Time and habits take their toll on all of us, but perhaps on boxers more than most.

Some armchair roughnecks go to fights to smell meat. But there was a time when the first whiff you got at a prizefight was of lipstick and smoke, mink and Cadillac. Madonna's bedroom is a boxing hall of fame, wallpapered with photographs of boxers. Muhammad Ali's is in the place of honor. It is signed, "Madonna—we're the greatest!"—a poignant reminder of what time can do to a famous act. Emily Dickinson is an unlikely bedfellow to put with Madonna and Ali, but in her peculiar way, she knew about this business, too. A century before Ali coined his famous slogan "dance like a butterfly, sting like a bee," Dickinson was writing boxers' and divas' fortunes:

Fame is a bee.
It has a song—
It has a sting—
Ah, too, it has a wing.

A good boxer knows how to fake. He shadows, ducks, feints. Sets left; throws right. Clinches and breaks. Circles one way, then reverses. Switch-hits. His body language is plain to see but difficult to read. Some movements are calculated to forbid, others to lure. Let me embrace you that I might hurt you. Difficult lover. But if boxing is one of the most illusory and least verbal

of athletic endeavors, it is arguably the form of physical culture on which the most artistic talent has been spent, the most poetic expression has been generated, and the most theoretical discourse is still being produced, as you are about to learn. I would even claim that boxing has given literature as many great novels as baseball, cinema more classic films than football, and criticism more meaningful essays than tennis. But this has much more to do with boxing inspiring ringside artists and writers than with poets and painters actually going at it. OK, Georges Braque loosened up with a sandbag in the morning, and Picasso is said to have enjoyed boxing—but only until André Derain showed him that the game isn't just about hitting, but getting hit.

David Scott is not only a professor of literature trained in semiotics, he is a light middleweight who has fought on both sides of the Atlantic. You don't have to know this fact to find Scott's book interesting, but it is one of the things that gives the ideas ground and traction. He knows what it means to work with his back to the ropes and to work for six months to go six minutes. The last time we met was at the Dublin University Amateur Boxing Club on the campus of Trinity College, where he trains. It is a plainly honest space, equipped with just what it needs—no pretense or excess. You enter it, and you want to stay. You trust it, like the voice of this book—a book that will nevertheless startle readers who never imagined that an art history or aesthetic theory could be produced by looking at the material culture of boxing, and a book that conciliates between ring theory and ring mechanics, bringing something new to the marriage of cultural criticism, visual analysis, and empirical knowledge. I think it is because David Scott has not only done his scholarly research but he has, in Lord Byron's terms, done time at Jackson's, that this works.

The bedroom of Lord Byron, which probably did not otherwise resemble Madonna's, was also full of boxing images, including a portrait of the poet sparring with his trainer, "Gentleman" John Jackson, in Jackson's Bond Street sparring rooms. Like Scott, Byron knew the difference between men who boxed and those who only talked the talk.

Who shoot not flying rarely touch a gun
Will he who swims not to the river run?
And men unpracticed in exchanging knocks
Must go to Jackson 'ere they dare to box.

Among writers, the glove and the pen have been worn on the same hand quite often, but again, not as commandingly as Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer would want us to believe. For this reason, I find it more interesting to consider boxing as a form of compensation for not writing than writing as a form of identification with boxing. When Barry McGuigan, the former world featherweight champion, was asked why he had become a boxer, he replied, "Because I can't be a poet. I can't tell stories." He took up the next best thing, as it were—boxing: the word made muscle.

All sports are narrative, to a degree. But the way time and space are delimited in boxing make the structure of its narrative particularly transparent. "Each round can be likened to a stanza or chapter, and the conclusion, as in the best narratives, is often in doubt until the closing moments . . . a great fight is a masterpiece of suspense." That's how the late poet and boxer Vernon Scannell once described boxing. "A poetry of physical action," he continued. Boxing is narrative, but it is also poetic; only language that is figurative can contain its contradictions. The first figure of boxing is the ring, "one of the most alluring and perturbing spaces in modern civilization," Scott tells us. But the boxing ring cannot be taken literally. In fact, as anyone who has watched a boxing match knows, the so-called ring is not a ring at all. Boxing takes place within a space whose name is paradoxical, belying a square that is parabolical. Tennis has its court, golf its green, baseball its diamond, hockey its rink, bowling its lane. These are all more or less literal equations for the zones within which these games are played; each of those names evokes an image of a precisely measured site. By that logic, it would seem that we could say that boxing has its site, its ring. But that ring is a simulacrum at best.

The ring of boxing is not only roped, it is troped. The name derives from an old practice, the memory of which conjures an image of fighters encircled by a string of men whooping it up and laying bets in prison yards or factory lots. A human rope of sympathetic spectators forming the approximate edge between boxing and the rest of the world, with a certain amount of awe and give. That is what a rope is. Something that holds, and something that gives, particularly the "elasticated" version which, as Scott explains, led to new tactical procedures of offense and defense in the ring.

But in the earlier, human form of enclosure, the rope of spectators offered

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a different kind of torque, shifting with the action as the fighters fell against them like cargo sliding into rails on a sea-tilted deck. There were no “corners” in the days when rings were human, only elbows, chests, and shoulders. If you were part of that line, you didn’t rigidly wall the fight, you went with it. Later, the human ring gave way to wooden rails, forming the first “squared circles” of London, until eventually, the rails gave way to the ropes and padded corners we have today. During that same history, the prison yard horn or factory whistle that we might imagine sometimes ended fights was replaced by a new sound: the mechanical bell that now signifies the end of a boxing round.

If the ring is the unit of boxing space, the round is the unit of boxing time, also named after circular gestures, in this case the paths that boxers trace as they stalk their quarry, round and round. And round: the word connotes the human lasso all over again. Indeed, the movements and gestures of boxers tend to be dominated by rounded segments and fragments of circles: uppercuts, swings, hooks, laps, bounces, embraces. And the gear of boxing—its apparel and hardware—also the subject of this book, is similarly comprised of curved forms and partial Os: gloves, posts, gumshields, bells, bags, stools, pads, clocks . . . not to mention the proudly proclaimed circumferences of heads, fists, and waists. As any trainer who has done the wraps knows, the taping of hands before a fight is not only a protective measure, but a hypnotic ritual that induces calm and focus in jittery combatants. As if being embalmed before a possible death, a warrior’s palms are encircled in gauze, ‘round and ‘round, before being sent off to war. So wrapped, boxers’ raw hands become padded cylinders, churning in space like enscribbled prayer wheels.

Boxing’s essence is an essence derived from circling, from curving motions and rounded notions—from counts, weaves, skips, backpedals, comebacks, and KOs. Boxing always comes back to the ring. The ring that is somehow soft and elliptical even as it is defined by things straight, hard, and statistical. Take the contradictions of boxing away, take the paradox of the ring away, and this book would not exist.

Roger L. Conover

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All translations into English of texts originally in French are by David Scott.

Introduction

Prizefighting was created in anticipation of mass industrialized society, where it has flourished as a sport and, even more startlingly, as an aesthetic.

Gerald Early

Even as boxing exploits it also liberates and, like most sports, it has an aesthetic quality which has intrinsic appeal to those who step into the ring.

John Sugden

The Fight World is the Outside World condensed and refracted.

James Ellroy

Boxing is a sport that elicits strong reactions, whether from the point of view of spectators, commentators, or participants. The latter, who experience the challenge and exhilaration of the sport, as it were, at first hand, tend predictably to be the most enthusiastic partisans, but the sport also has a wide following among nonaficionados. There is also a smaller but nonetheless vocal group who question the moral basis of a sport in which the principal aim, at a professional level at least, is to render another human being unconscious, or who worry about the way the primarily sporting aspect of the game has been cynically perverted and commercialized by its professionalization and mediatization. Two main current conceptions of boxing can be summarized as follows.

One view of boxing sees it as a larger-than-life phenomenon, an epic of potentially tragic dimensions in which professional fighters pit their strength

against each other in a struggle almost to the death. The combatants, often denizens of black, colored, or Hispanic ghettos, find in this rough trade one of the few avenues out of poverty and obscurity and devote their whole energies to perfecting their power to knock out or otherwise seriously incapacitate their opponent and thus achieve victory and celebrity. The involvement of most viewers—it is generally a mass audience—is vicarious, being mediated by television or video, whose voyeuristic lens adds both a distancing and intensifying effect. A devastating demolition of one boxer by the other is the primary aim of a match, the buildup to which is carefully orchestrated by the media in the runup. Large sums of money are generated by the fight, both in terms of the “purses” of the competing boxers and the box office and television rights, most of whose takings go to the small number of promoters who monopolize what is conceived as a kind of industry. This view of boxing as a mediatised fight game of spectacular dimensions dominated by professional heavyweights managed by rapacious impresarios is broadly an American one and has to date been most fully stated (or overstated) by Joyce Carol Oates (1987).

A second view of boxing sees it more as a sport or game, a notable part of whose interest can be found at an amateur level. So while Oates finds it difficult to conceive of boxing as a sport, let alone as a game, other writers, who hold a different conception of boxing, have no problem with either term. It is the skill of the individual as a boxer as much as a fighter that is a center of interest, and the proceedings in a backstreet or college gym (figure 1) can be absorbing as any megastar boxing event broadcast worldwide. The interest is in the interaction of the two opponents, in the resilience, flair, and elegance of their boxing style. This is more a British/Irish or general European view that perhaps sees in boxing one of the seminal sports tracing its European history back at least as far as the Greeks and the Olympic Games. This conception of boxing implies a greater openness to general participation, even if only at a fitness level, with the most enthusiastic viewers of the sport often having some firsthand experience of what is at stake in it. It is a conception that has been articulated across a range of both journalistic and fictional writing on boxing, and most convincingly by Vernon Scannell (1963).

These two views of boxing are not of course exclusive; indeed they complement each other. Boxing, like other sports, is about pushing human capabilities

to their limits, and with such human interest at stake, it is inevitable, especially in a media age like that of today, that the more extreme tendencies of the game should be explored. The alternative view is necessary however as a counter to this, for boxing, despite all the symbolism or neuroses invested in it (to be discussed further in chapter 9), is after all only another sport, one which, though very grueling, is no more so than, say, running or cycling. Boxing is not, as George Foreman claimed, to the approval of Oates (1987, 39), the sport to which all other sports aspire. Sports by definition aspire to fulfill the maximum potential of their own intrinsic possibilities and, in the process, to test the capabilities of their participants to the limits enshrined in the rules of the game, while providing enthralling entertainment for their viewers. In this way each sport has its particular fascination, eliciting a combination of qualities (speed, stamina, dexterity, strength, agility) and offering a unique range of pleasure and interest to viewer and participant. In the case of boxing, the two differing though complementary views of the sport imply a different aesthetic as well as moral conception. Whereas the former more absolutist view implies tragic drama with attendant blood and possibly death, in any case some devastating climax, the latter implies a less bombastic, though still serious, kind of entertainment in which, as in dance, process as much as finale is of primary interest.

For the participant, especially one competing at the amateur level, boxing offers nevertheless an experience of physical and psychological intensity that is perhaps unlike that of any other sport. This intensity is a function of various factors. The first is that it brings the boxer up against the real, the gritty resistance of matter—here encountered in the form of the fist or body of the other boxer—a real that is more devastating not least in that it comes proactively forward to meet you. Concomitantly, you yourself go forward to encounter the real in an aggressive and determined fashion, seeking out the resistance or resilience of the opponent in an equally concerted way. The second factor, one that triggers the complex psychological reverberations inherent to boxing, is that the opponent one faces may be construed to be a version of oneself, someone closely matched in size and weight, a kind of mirror image in which one comes up against oneself in terms not only of psychology or imagination but also of the three-dimensional real. In this way it is possible to probe and to explore, to feel and to fend off of the other, and in the

process, oneself, before finally accepting and embracing it. The concentration of each opponent on the other's eyes is an essential element of this process whereby the will or spirit of the other becomes the key to the physical action. The way that the physical appearance of the sparring partner, often a friend, becomes subtly transformed by the insertion of the gum-shield and the addition of the protective helmet is not the least strange of the metamorphoses that the boxing encounter brings about.¹

The "high" or adrenaline rush that invariably accompanies the boxing experience (even one of defeat or humiliation) is a function of the confrontation and engagement with the challenge of the real transmogrified in this mysterious fashion. So the glow of acquiescence felt at the end of the encounter in part results from the recognition of the real as other in particular insofar as it is experienced through the agency of another version of oneself. The feeling of fraternal affection at the end of the match or sparring, even for the opponent who has been one's undoing, also follows from this situation of identification with and resistance to the other. In this way, as Scannell says—rubbing "the commanding officer or headmaster belief that boxing 'makes a man of you'" and arguing that "as a moral therapy . . . boxing is a dead loss"—boxing permits "a man to behave in a way that is beyond and above his normal capacity" (1963, 43). Boxing also permits him to delve into that capacity and to experience it as pure life and energy.

From the spectator's point of view, the dynamics inherent in boxing as outlined above are experienced in more aesthetic terms, the visceral interaction of the two opponents being translated in part into a kind of visual pleasure in the form of dance or choreography. The boxing ring, as three-dimensional picture frame, offers in this way an alluring theater for action in which the two participants, mediated by the flitting white presence of the referee, perform their various, and more or less predictable or ritualistic, actions. Boxing thus becomes from the viewer's perspective a play of matching or near-matching forces which, personified as human beings, through formalized but nonetheless very real confrontation, explore human potential in physical and psychological terms. Although boxing is like theater in the aesthetic pleasure it offers and in its aim to reenact ritual movement, it is closer to the real, and therefore to a more intense level, of excitement. This is because there is real risk in it, both physical and psychological. The blows exchanged

hurt, and ultimately the aim is to knock out or temporarily incapacitate one participant—in other words subdue them to forces of a real that is greater than themselves. The drawing of blood, as in any ancient or primitive sacrificial rite, undoubtedly intensifies the experience for audience and boxers, the inevitability of pain both confirming and ennobling the confrontation with the violence that is inherent in both matter and in human and animal life. Similarly, the audience usually experiences the same feeling of relief and acquiescence at the end of the match as the participants—though the level of intensity of these feelings is variable—as order and civilization are restored after the alluring but dangerous detour through the primitive and the primeval that the boxing match represents or enacts.

My book explores further the function and importance of the aesthetic aspect of boxing. In doing so, it combines the insights of an amateur who has a participatory interest in boxing with those of a critic specializing in the field of signs and images (semiotics) as applied to literature, the visual arts, and to cultural studies in general. Such an approach will, it is hoped, allow certain issues implicit to, but not normally explored within, more conventional approaches to the world of boxing to be drawn more to the forefront.

Like most sports, boxing is a highly formalized and stylized activity. Its particular quality in its modern form is to reconfigure the potentially lethal and anarchic elements that constitute fighting into an organized and legible form of combat. Stance, movement, clothing, rules or codes of conduct, division into fixed-length rounds, and, above all, the boxing ring itself all contribute to a process in which each element, through a system of aestheticization, contributes to the overall visual coherence of the sport. This process is fundamental from the point of view both of the spectator and of the boxer: for the former it provides focus for the gaze and ensures maximum visibility; for the latter it provides a stable environment for action. In exploring further the aesthetics of boxing, this book looks in particular at the contribution of aesthetics to the functional efficiency of the sport and to the clarification of some of the deeper issues at stake in its rigorously organized form. In any human culture, a high degree of formalization or aestheticization invariably signals an important semiotic function: that of drawing attention to an object or action and suggesting a deeper symbolic dimension to it. In other words, aestheticization constitutes a form of marking or

highlighting. It is the aim in the first part of this book to identify and analyze the intrinsic aesthetic dimensions of boxing as a sport, and, in the second and third parts, to explore the degree to which aesthetic responses to boxing, whether from the point of view of artists, writers, or graphic designers, provide special insight into the complexities that enable this sport to exert its continuing fascination.

The first part of the book thus investigates how, in boxing, aesthetic highlighting takes place. The first chapter takes a brief historical glance at the development and evolution of boxing practices in relation to site (the ring), apparel (standardization and use of gloves), and the makeup and motivation of the audience—betting as well as appreciation of the “Sweet Science of Bruising” (Egan 1824) was originally an intrinsic part of the boxing scene and undoubtedly affected the evolution of some of its conventions and practices. A second chapter is devoted to analyzing the stylized stance and movement and the progressive glamorization of the combatant’s body, both in its legible muscularity and in its minimal but spectacular adornment. A third chapter focuses on the development of the boxing ring itself and reflects on the dynamics inherent in it from the point of view both of combatant and spectator. The role of the ropes, for example, is central—in both containing the action and in providing the combatants with a means of defense and counterattack. And of course the ropes also express the tensions of the boxing encounter in both physical and psychological terms—to the extent that the symbolism of boxing has become part of general parlance (being “up against the ropes,” “boxed into a corner,” etc.). In this way the boxing ring both contains and expresses action within what is in effect a three-dimensional picture frame.

The second part of the book shows how various forms of artistic representation of boxing help to highlight its aesthetic and symbolic importance. Boxing is appreciated by large audiences not only as an enthralling sport but also as a metaphor, a focus of profound identification, whether in terms of a situation—a mythical struggle, a binary opposition—or a combatant—a potential hero, a symbol of personal, communal, or racial investment (see Sammons 1990, 31; Piper 1996, 71). The golden age of modern boxing (the first decades of the twentieth century) coincided with an upsurge in representations of the sport in avant-garde painting and literature, to the extent

that it becomes the “ultimate modernist spectacle” (Chandler 1996, 17). One chapter of the book thus investigates the link between boxing and modernist and futurist action, while a second explores the expressive relation between the canvas and ropes of the ring and the canvas and frame of painting. A third chapter shows how boxing-related installations by contemporary artists such as James Coleman and Philippe Perrin throw light on the way even the minutiae of ring-craft or fight preparation can be deeply invested with symbolic importance. Graphic representations by poster artists such as Luigi Castiglioni and Claude Kuhn offer, on the other hand, an insight into public psychological investment in boxing, suggesting some of the unstated but nonetheless authentic expectations the audience brings to the sport and the meanings it attaches to it.

The final part of the book looks at some of the ways writers on boxing enable us better to appreciate its aesthetic and symbolic potential. The focus here is not so much on boxing fiction, of which there is a considerable and interesting corpus (a selection of which is listed in the bibliography), but rather on approaches to the sport that attempt to rationalize or interpret its visceral reality. This implies perspectives committed to penetrating the deeper social, personal, and psychological aspects of the sport, viewed both from the point of view of the boxer and his audience. Of course some boxing fiction is able to do this, particularly that by such writers as F. X. Toole (*Rope Burns*, 2000) and Leonard Gardner (*Fat City*, 1969) who have had a real professional involvement with the sport. The fiction of writers such as George Bernard Shaw (*Cashel Byron's Profession*, 1886) and Jack London (*The Game*, 1905, and *The Abysmal Brute*, 1913), on the other hand, while offering valuable perspectives on boxing and the boxing scene, is often complicated by romantic or other themes. Similarly, although books by P. G. Wodehouse such as *The Pothunters* (1924) give an invaluable insight into early-twentieth-century British schoolboy boxing, the boxing interest is usually only an episode in a larger fictional project. My book, in contrast, focuses on equally important but somewhat less noticed modernist poets and writers who integrate boxing themes into a fictional, autobiographical, or metaphorical framework. So, chapter 8 looks in general at boxing's richness as a source of metaphor and more particularly at how modern poets such as Arthur Cravan, Paul Eluard, and Tristan Tzara pinpoint some of the paradoxes at the heart of

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boxing. Meanwhile, chapter 9 investigates, through reference to key modernists such as Maurice Maeterlinck, Robert Musil, and Vladimir Nabokov and boxing writers as talented as Gerald Early, Carlo Rotella, and Vernon Scannell, boxing's ability to provide solutions to some of the issues confronting man in the modern world, in particular in the wake of the collapse of traditional values after the First World War, a moment coinciding with the onset of the golden age of boxing from the 1920s.

Overall then, the aim of this book, in presenting boxing in its semiotic and aesthetic as well as its more general sporting and sociological aspects, is not only to present a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the sport in its own right but also to show how a deeper analysis of it in artistic and symbolic terms reflects the profound cultural investment in boxing and the space in which it is played out. So, for example, the focus on boxing apparel is not only an attempt to point up some of paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the sport but also to show how these features are signs reflecting conflicting cultural conceptions in relation to violence, glamour, and masculinity. So the wearing by fine specimens of male athleticism of shorts (standard masculine attire) made out of satin (conventionally a feminine fabric) worn inside out and back to front, becomes a trigger to reflection on the contradictory impulses in modern society relating to gender, undressing, nudity, and display of physical and psychological energies. Similarly, the focus on the boxing ring as an aesthetic space, a forum within which harmonious and discordant energies interrelate, seeking a resolution that is both anticipated and yet surprising, offers a fruitful analogy to the ambitions of modern art in which tensions between order and chaos, stasis and dynamism, seek harmonious resolution. In its very public reenactment and in its highly stylized and ceremonialized forms, boxing is like a primitive ritual in which the darker or more ambiguous energies of a society are acted out, with their full implications being only partly or unconsciously grasped by the viewers. In this sense boxing reveals that it is, like other sports, itself a popular form of theater or art in which the symbolic aspect of the game is as important as the excitement it offers as a real event having a real impact on the participants in it.

In the context of symbolic action and sign display, boxing is particularly privileged as a sport. This is because boxing is both highly concentrated and

focused in its action—two men in a visible yet confined space acting out a performance of extreme violence—and uniquely paradoxical in its glamorous trappings and its display of nudity. Like many primitive rituals, it is highly eroticized and engages the viewer on a number of levels, not all of which are in the heat of the action consciously apprehended. In this respect it offers a fascinating object for cultural analysis and a source of reverie that, as this book is perhaps the first comprehensively to show, has had a deep impact on many important artists, writers, and filmmakers throughout the twentieth century.

The theoretical approach of this book attempts to be consonant with the rich cultural nexus on which it draws. Each of the book's three main parts reflects the layered approach taken in respect to boxing as a cultural, artistic, and literary phenomenon. The first part, in exploring the inherent aesthetics of boxing, follows a broadly ethnographic model of cultural analysis. Unlike Loïc Wacquant, however, in his pioneering socioethnographic approach to boxing in *Corps et âme: Carnets ethnographiques d'un apprenti boxeur* (2000), my study does not focus exclusively on the sociological and ethnological issues at stake in modern boxing, in particular as they relate to issues of race and color in contemporary Chicago. Rather, the fundamental anthropological issues relating to masculinity, violence, and physical prowess are explored in their historical and aesthetic dimension, that is, in the ways that they have over time been stylistically transformed in the interests of maximizing their symbolic or mythological status. In the book's second part, a second layer of analysis is mediated by the representation of boxing in specific artworks, that is, objects or images that are themselves aesthetic, and through which some of the otherwise hidden or obscure dimensions of the aesthetic transformation of violence through boxing become more readily apparent. Finally, in the third part, devoted to the analysis and representation of boxing in modern writing—poetic, fictional, and critical—the aesthetic dimension of boxing is further illuminated by the multiple cultural, ethnographic, and theoretical insights that recent (mostly twentieth-century) writing has drawn from its observations and reflections on the sport. Of course none of these layers is watertight: the aesthetic, by emphasizing the semiotic importance of phenomena, is ineluctably connected with the ethnographic or sociological, while writing reflects and articulates both ethnographic-sociological

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and aesthetic thinking. However, the separate but linked consideration given to these different perspectives should permit a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complexities of boxing and provide a model of analysis that answers more fully to the multiple disciplinary possibilities opened by the sport as a cultural phenomenon. A particular strategy that this book employs is the use of illustrations in such a way that in themselves they constitute a kind of visual argument complementing and enhancing that of the written text.



The Art and Aesthetics of Boxing



Framing Violence: The Aesthetics of the Ring

I. The Evolution of Boxing as Regulated Action and Spectacle

In boxing, as in many other fields, there is very little new under the sun, and millions of fists over thousands of years have developed the art and science of boxing to what it is today.

John V. Grombach

It is a great thrill to feel that all that separates you from the early Victorians is a series of punches on the nose.

A. J. Liebling

Violence is an intrinsic potentiality of most forms of human and animal life. What civilizes violence in human societies is not so much its elimination as its regulation and control through communally agreed conventions. Thus actions such as killing, unthinkable in peacetime, become tolerable within the conventions of war, while fighting between individuals, frowned upon in regular society, becomes acceptable, is indeed promoted, if it takes the form of boxing or other recognized martial arts. Indeed it has been argued that the elaboration of forms of regulated and codified violence such as boxing is closely related to the development of civilization (see Grombach 1949, 147; Rauch 1992, 117–18). Such controlled forms of violence are optimally public because it is important that they should be viewed by a representative section of the community and thus serve their purpose as a controlled enactment of the violence that might otherwise irrupt in other, uncontrolled ways.¹ It is for this reason that today as much as at any time in the past, sports and games perform a necessary function in civil society by providing an outlet for violent impulses as well as entertainment and amusement.

The evolution of boxing as more or less recorded in history over the last three thousand years reflects the gradual civilization or formalization of the lethal and chaotic potentiality of fighting. First and foremost, boxing became, with the Greeks, a general spectacle, viewed in a public arena, within a defined space. The performance of the combatants became thus open to public approbation and judgment within a certain ethos. Ethical principles such as fairness and the reduction of unnecessary brutality were natural corollaries, and although differences of weight (and therefore power) between boxers began to be regularized only at the beginning of the modern period (from the late eighteenth century), the sense of the match being even was always an important part of the spectator's pleasure. As boxing over the last two centuries became more refined, the instruments gauging evenness of match (in particular weight divisions) have become more finely calibrated. Likewise, an increasing move, once again initiated by the Greeks, toward protecting the boxer from lethal damage is reflected in the now standardized use of gloves of agreed weight, gum-shields (first used in 1913 by the British boxer Ted "Kid" Lewis), hand wraps, and abdominal guards (the Taylor Foulproof Cup, see figure 65 in chapter 9, was introduced in 1930), with headguards now compulsory in amateur boxing. The regulation of the period of combat—division into rounds of fixed length with one-minute intervals (a nineteenth-century development codified in the Queensbury Rules of 1865, officially adopted in 1892) and the gradual reduction of the number of rounds fought—fulfills, in theory at any rate, a similar function. These civilizing refinements also enhance the visual clarity of boxing as performance and the audience's ability to judge the match.

Despite this gradual evolution toward a more controlled and civilized form of combat, boxing of course still retains some of its primeval lethal potential. In Roman and Etruscan times the use of lead-weighted or spiked boxing gloves—respectively, the *caestus* (figure 2) and the *myrmex*—and the heavy, chopping blows associated with them (figure 3), the use of slaves as combatants in the amphitheater, and the convention that matches might be fought to the death, or the death of the loser prescribed, brought to the forefront the inherent brutality of the sport. Similarly, although since the late nineteenth century boxing gloves have become compulsory (the last bare-knuckle fight for the heavyweight championship of the world—between John L. Sullivan

and Jake Kilrain, over seventy-five rounds—took place in 1889), as Bernard Shaw (1886) and others (e.g., Early 1994, 31) have argued, their use in no way softened the violence of the sport, indeed perhaps the contrary. This is because gloves protect the boxer's fist more than the body of his opponent, and the fist is the most fragile component in the boxing encounter. With the fist protected and strengthened by bandaging and gloves, especially if wielded by a superfit heavyweight, the damage it can inflict is far greater than that of the unprotected hand of the bare-knuckle fighters of the previous era. Today's heavyweight professional boxing is therefore still a highly dangerous sport and one capable, as many have witnessed (e.g., Oates 1987), of inflicting devastating damage.

Similarly, from the boxer's point of view, as Bernard Shaw was also among the first to argue, limiting the round lengths to three or four (now two or three) minutes, with ten seconds to recover from a knockdown (the ten second rule was introduced in London in 1873), was a mixed blessing. Quite apart from the fact three minutes can seem like an eternity if one is up against it—Robert Anasi refers to this experience as “a three-minute thousand years” (2002, 24), in the old prize ring in which the round had no fixed duration, the fall of either combatant immediately gave the respite of thirty seconds, and could thus be reckoned on in moments of difficulty. What some more recent and apparently humanizing refinements of boxing in fact reflect then is the greater measurability and visibility of the sport, enhancing the audience's appreciation and the adjudicators' judgment of the boxers' performance (see Gorn 1989, 205). The telltale white tops of modern amateur boxing gloves are a case in point; they facilitate the judges' ability to assess the number of punches that actually make contact and thus to award points in a level of the sport at which speed and accuracy as much as knockout power is of the essence. With TV and the demands of network scheduling this clear demarcation of performance in temporal and visual terms becomes even more important.

Another important factor in the codification of the visibility of boxing as a sport was a function of its role—like cockfighting or horse racing—as a focus (if often illegal) for gambling and betting. Prizefights in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England were usually organized by rich, often aristocratic patrons for the benefit of themselves and others of the boxing

and gambling fraternity—the “Fancy” as they used to be called (forerunner of today’s “fans”). Bets very often changed as the matches developed (in those days, rounds were unregulated in length and number) and it was obviously important for the Fancy to have a clear view of the match’s progression. One result of this requirement was the gradual regularization and reduction of the size of the boxing ring. The latter was a “ring” because initially viewers were grouped in a circle. The circle became squared when the fight ground became roped off or fenced in using posts linked with taught ropes. Circular rings have occasionally been reintroduced—as late as the twentieth century—in England in 1912 and in America in 1944 (see Fleischer and André, 1976, 229). Sometimes there were outer and inner rings, the former a kind of no-man’s-land that ensured visibility for the often huge crowd beyond, the inner marking out the space of combat itself. In John Broughton’s *Rules*, drawn up in 1743, there was in addition a square yard or “scratch” chalked in the center of the combat area or “stage” at which both fighters presented themselves at the beginning or resumption of the set-to. This convention, along with the other rules codified by Broughton, marked “the first attempt to introduce order and some discipline into the proceedings [and] gave impetus towards the recognition of boxing as a legalized sport, and the development of further sets of rules, leading to the regulations, designed for the protection of the boxer and the improvement of the sport as spectacle, which are in use throughout the world today” (Hartley 1989, 19).

In the earlier days of prizefighting, seconds and the timekeeper were allowed in the combat ring itself. They were relegated to the outside with the ring’s reduction in size (to a maximally twenty-four-foot square) in the nineteenth century, after which only the boxers remained in the ring during the rounds of fighting. Part of the referee’s skill—since his readmittance in the early twentieth century to the ring—is to become a quasi-invisible presence, moving with agility to avoid the combatants while regulating the smooth progression of the combat. The modern ring, with its elasticated ropes, padded corners, and pillarless construction, dates from the late nineteenth century and is of a design so elegant and functional that it has scarcely been altered since. First introduced in 1892 (for the Sammy Kelly–Bob Cunningham fight at Coney Island, New York), padding was made mandatory in 1948. While the London Prize Ring Rules specified two guard ropes, this went up to three later in the century

with the Queensbury Rules, with four becoming the norm after 1963 when the featherweight boxer Davey Moore died as a result of a snapping ring rope. The elastication of the ropes of course had important repercussions for the boxer's ring-craft, enhancing the range of options open to him and also the visual interest of the sport from the spectators' point of view. In this way, the violence of the boxing combat has become limited and contained while at the same time the visibility of the combatants and their actions has been maximized. The boxers are fully aware of the limits of their field of action and, for the audience, the theater of action becomes one of almost hallucinatory clarity and fascination. For some this excessive visibility becomes a kind of obscenity in which the danger or suffering of the boxers is vicariously enjoyed. This point will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The separation and regularization of the different boxing weight categories, another vital feature in the modern development of the sport, date from the end of the eighteenth century. The current main weight categories, instituted from the beginning of the twentieth century, are as follows: heavyweight (above 175 pounds), light heavyweight (up to 175 pounds), middleweight (up to 160 pounds), welterweight (up to 147 pounds), lightweight (up to 130 pounds), featherweight (up to 126 pounds), bantamweight (up to 118 pounds), and flyweight (up to 112 pounds). Other divisions have also been introduced subsequently, and include cruiserweight (up to 195 pounds), junior middleweight (up to 154 pounds), junior welterweight (up to 140 pounds), and junior featherweight (up 122 pounds). The first division after heavyweight (which is what most prizefighters were up to the mid-eighteenth century) was lightweight, introduced in 1746. It included all weights in effect from today's middleweight downward, the latter category being the next to be instituted later in the eighteenth century. This was soon supplemented by the welterweight category for boxers weighing up to 140 pounds, though this category was not properly instated until the late nineteenth century. A "welter," an English horse racing term, was a ten-stone (140-pound) weight carried by a horse in a handicap race. The lighter categories, including bantamweight (a "bantam" is a small chicken), followed in the late nineteenth century, their relative profusion indicating that differences in weight between smaller men have a much more pronounced impact on punching power than among heavier boxers. Although heavyweights continue to attract the greatest interest,

as Grombach (1949, 108) and others have noted, the middleweight category has produced some of the greatest hitters and the most skilled and resilient boxers of modern times—from Tom Sayers to Sugar Ray Robinson and Carlos Monzon.² Overall, the separation and multiplication of weight differences has generally led to the enhancement of parity among competing boxers and thus to a fairer exchange within the boxing encounter, so that skills and stamina as much as strength become the focus of viewers' attention.

To summarize, the aim of this progressive refinement and codification of boxing has been to enhance the clarity of boxing as a spectacle and to maximize the viewer's judgment and enjoyment of the action. The emphasis on symmetry—boxers of more or less equal weight, fighting from opposite corners in contrasting colors—facilitates the viewer's appreciation of the action which itself, though closely regulated, is prone to all kinds of chaotic and unanticipated configurations. Shadowboxing fighters are commonly described as "making shapes," and this is indeed what they do also within the ring, though following an order and with a degree of surprise and violence that it is impossible always to anticipate. Fighting itself is chaotic, as will be confirmed by anyone who has witnessed an impromptu set-to or who has had the misfortune to be involved in military confrontation in its variously lethal guises in the twentieth century. The organization of boxing becomes therefore a reflection of its symbolic as well as its real significance: the aim of boxing is not just to stage a fight (though this is a vital part of the sport) but also to set in train an action that will have symbolic importance. One fighter may represent a certain color, race, nationality, or religious belief—one thinks of the ideological overtones that added further excitement to Muhammad Ali's and George Foreman's 1974 "Rumble in the Jungle";³ one fighter may be the underdog attempting to fight his way out of poverty or obscurity; or both fighters may be wishing to bolster the fragile identity of the modern male by a display of manly courage and endurance that no other social outlet allows them to assert. Whatever the issues at stake, boxing provides an elegant and symmetrical format within which tensions and conflicting aspirations may be more or less consciously worked out, combining enthralling entertainment with a display of courage and pain.

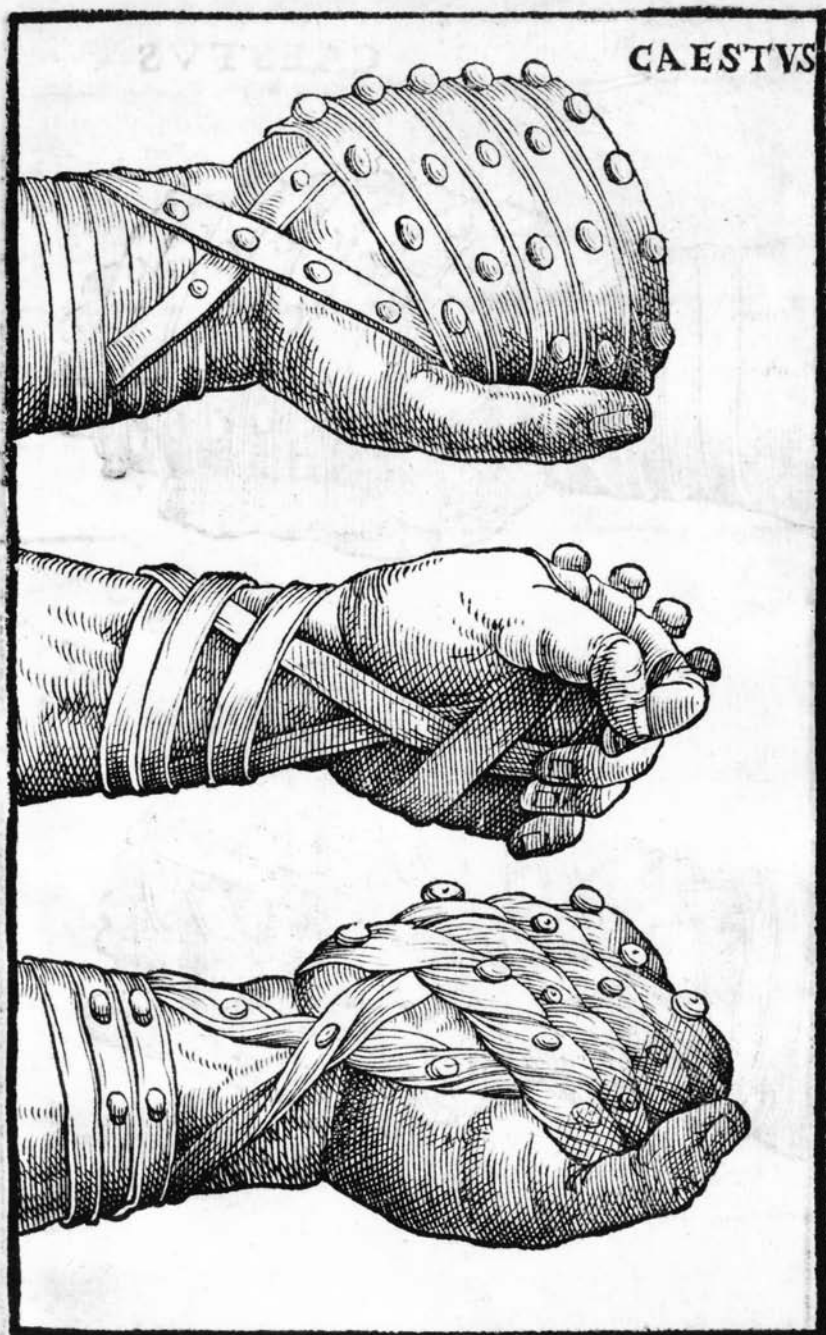


Figure 2. Hieronymus Mercurialis, *Caesti*, from *De arte gymnastica*, 1573.
Courtesy Trinity College Dublin Library.

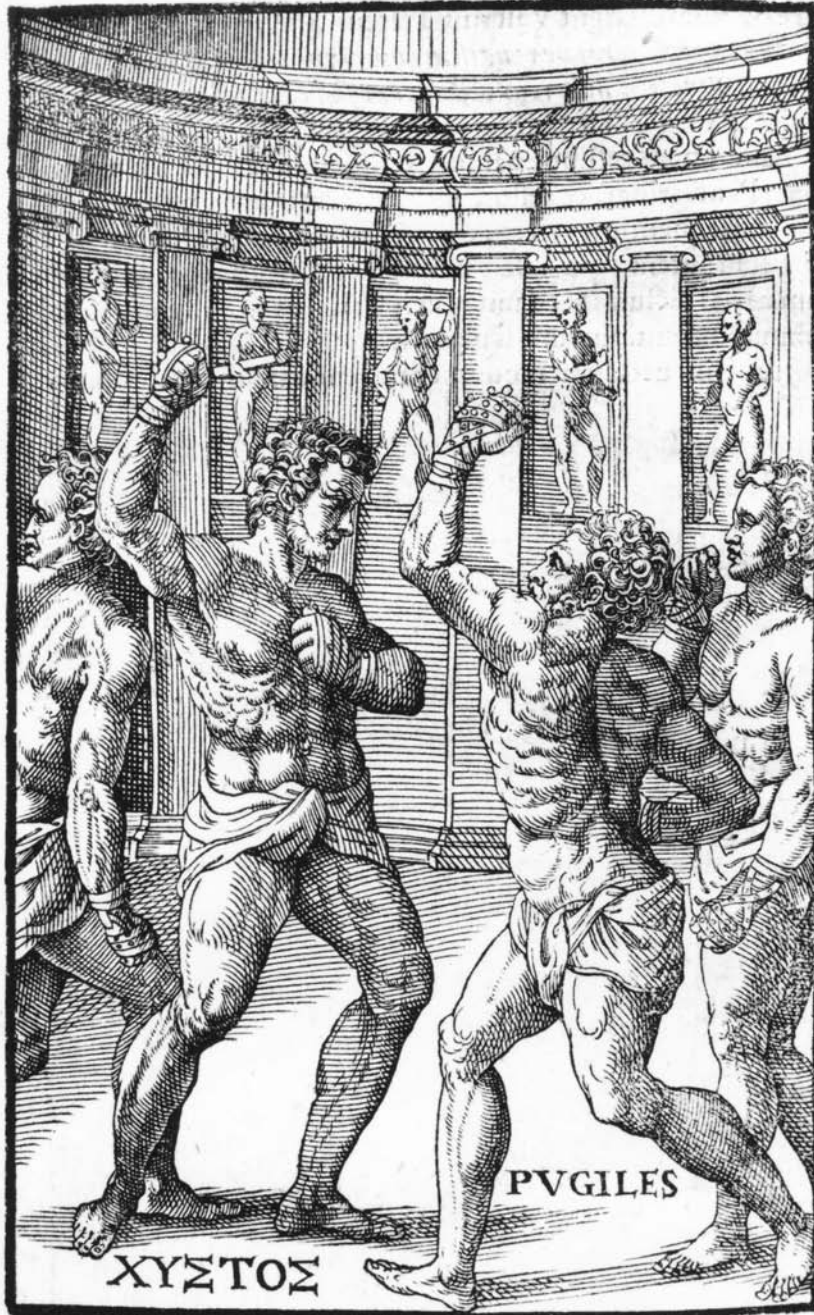


Figure 3. Hieronymus Mercurialis, Roman Boxers, from *De arte gymnastica*, 1573.
Courtesy Trinity College Dublin Library.

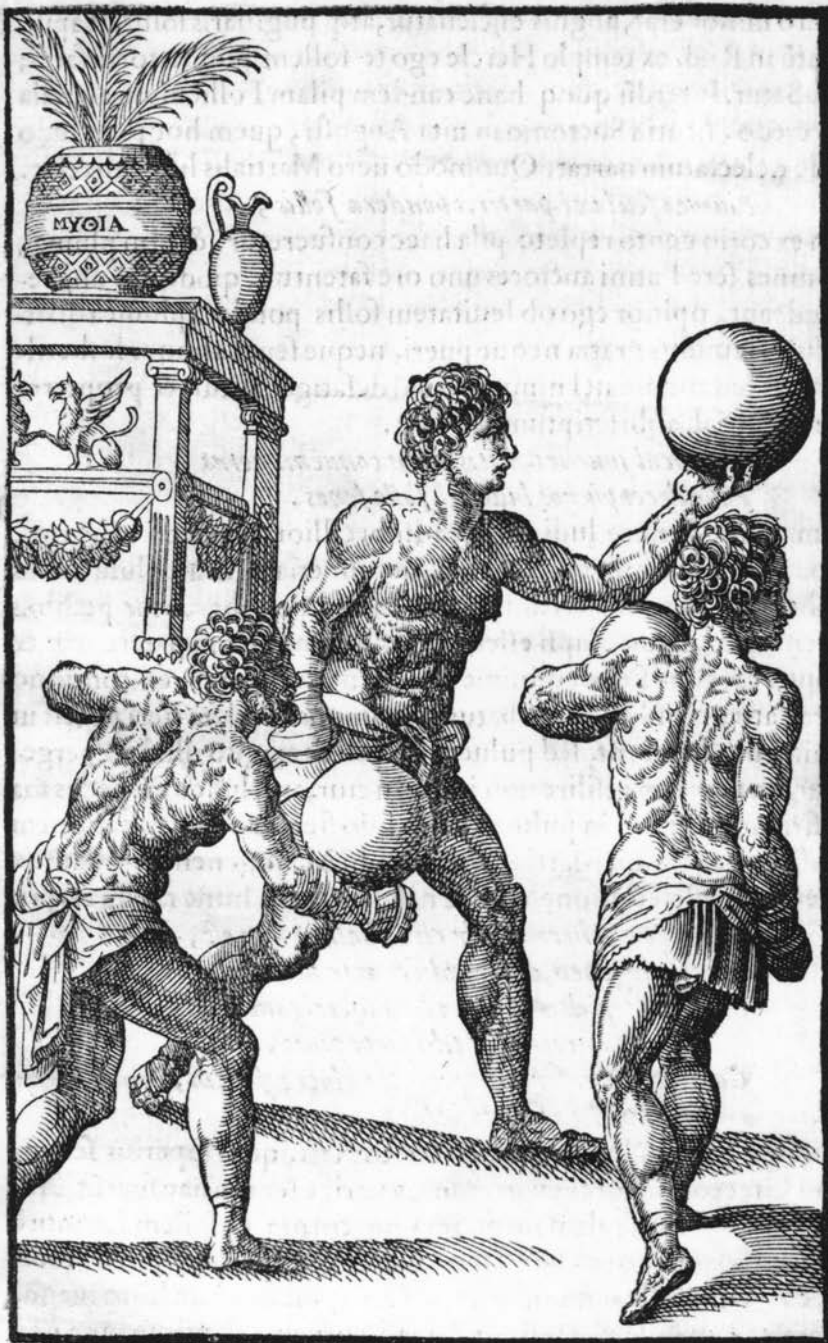


Figure 4. Hieronymus Mercurialis, Boxers Training with Medicine Balls, from *De arte gymnastica*, 1573. Courtesy Trinity College Dublin Library.

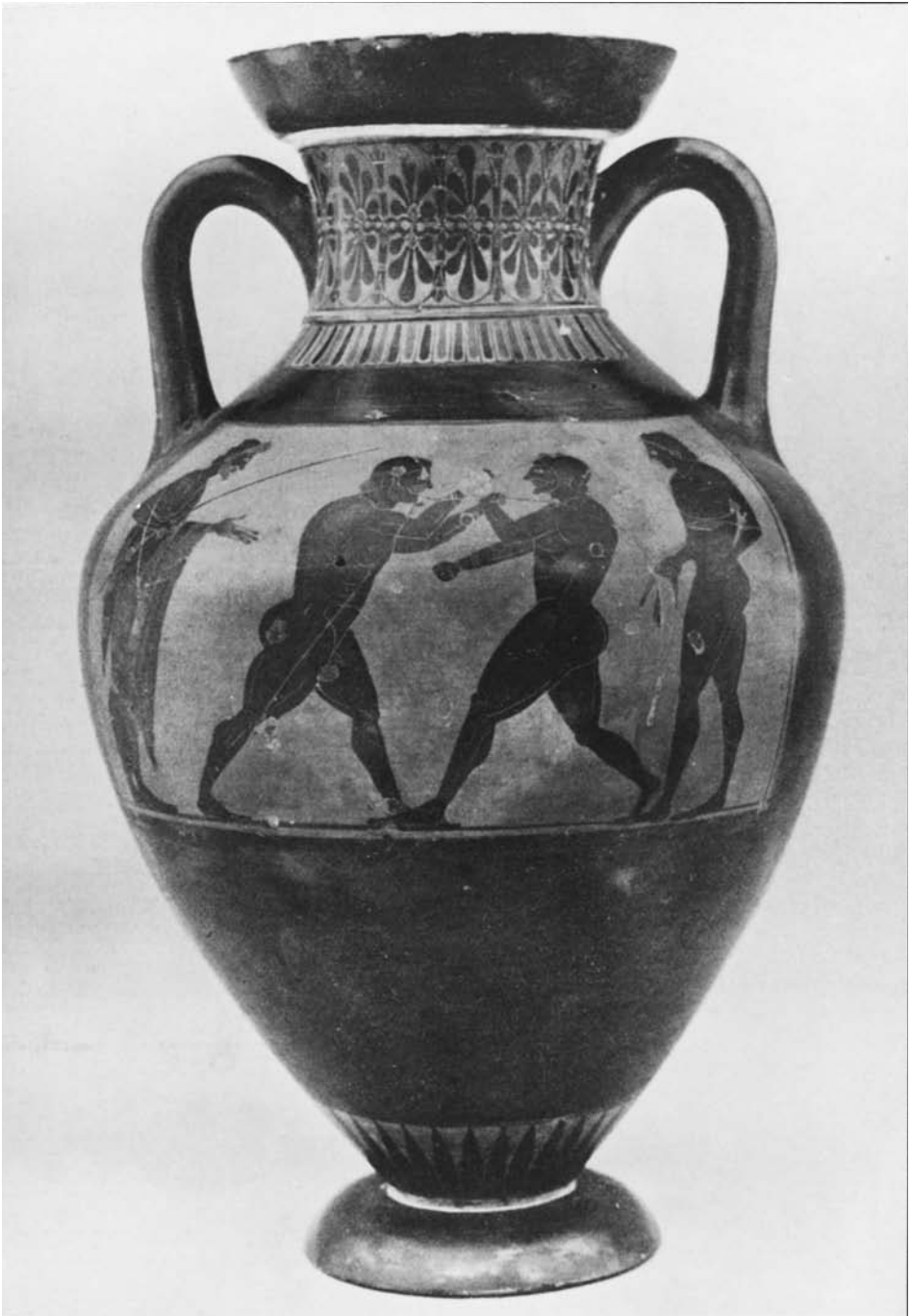


Figure 5. Greek vase from Rhodes, sixth century BC.
Reproduced by permission of University of Pennsylvania Museum (image #MS403).

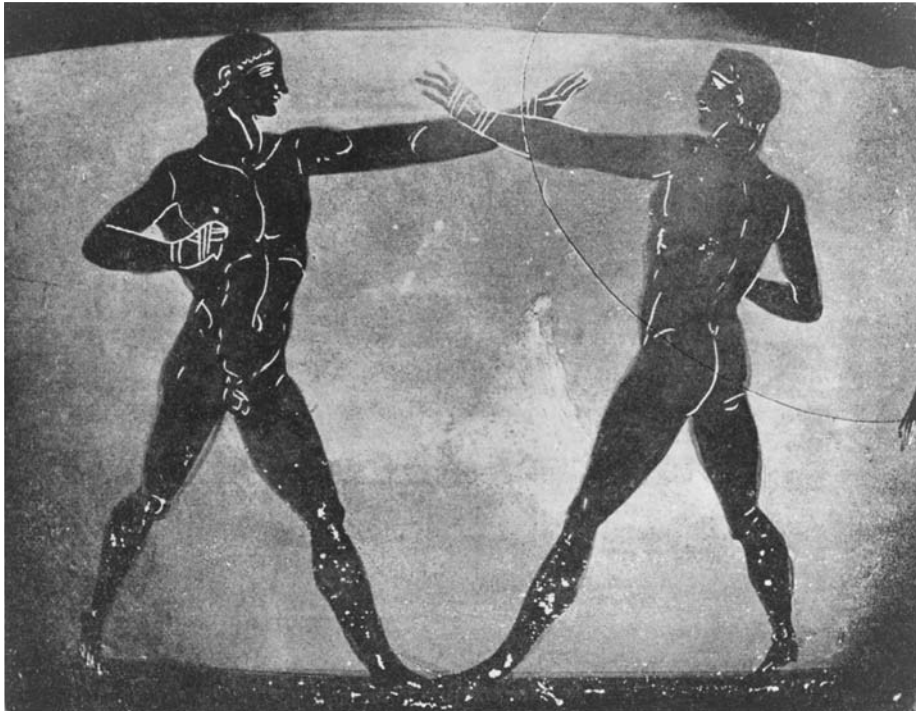


Figure 6. Greek vase, fourth century BC.
Originally printed in John V. Grombach, *The Saga of the Fist*
(1949; repr., London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1977).

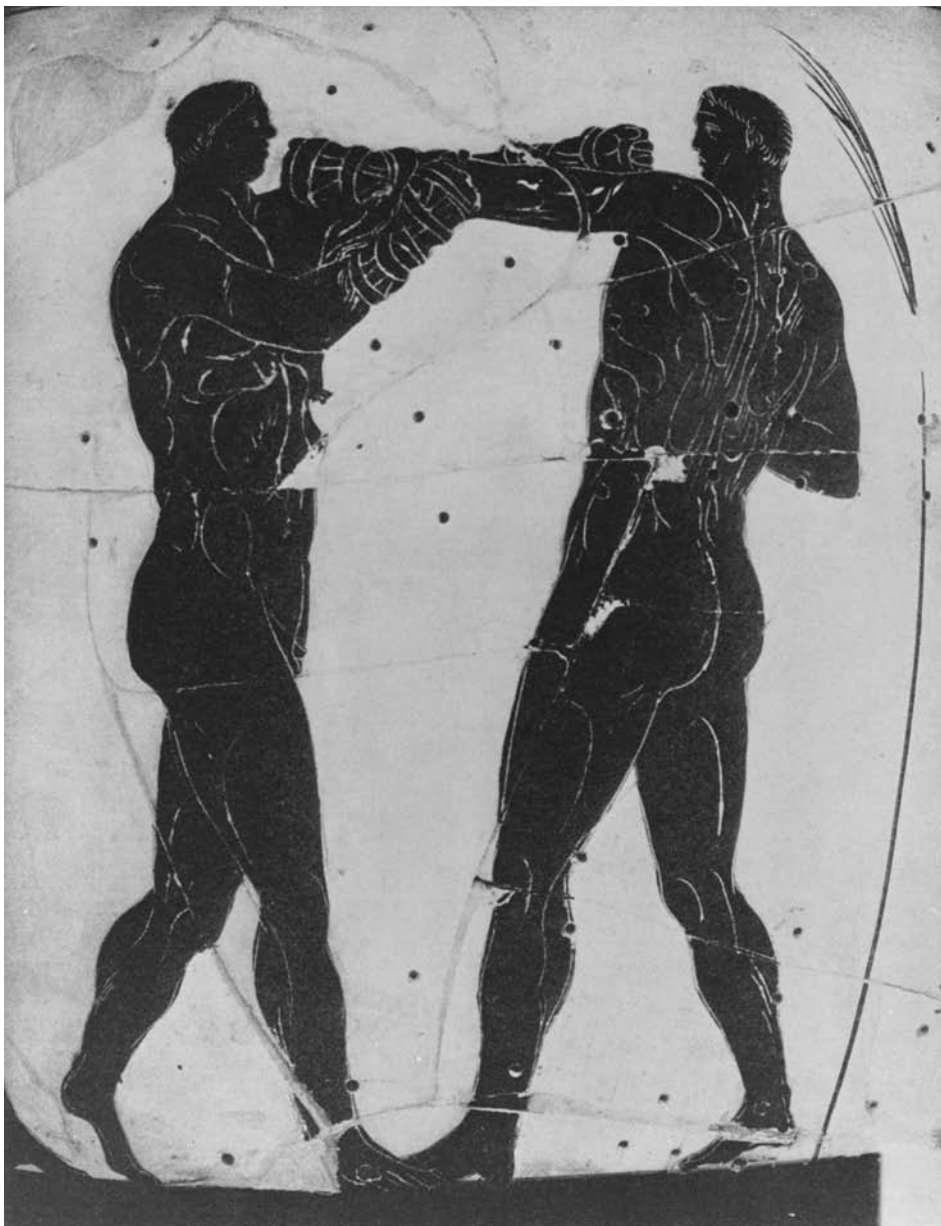


Figure 7. Greek vase, 336 BC.
Originally printed in John V. Grombach, *The Saga of the Fist*
(1949; repr., London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1977).



Figure 8. Greek boxer, seated, marble.
Reproduced by permission of Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Rome.

2. Boxing Apparel and the Legible Body

In the boxer's basic stance, one of the most beautiful positions taken by the male physique, all the muscles of the body become legible. From head to toe not a single ounce of strength is wasted. Every ounce is directed toward one or other of two massive fists, each supercharged with energy.

Maurice Maeterlinck

Whenever a male squares up to an opponent he automatically draws upon the culture of boxing.

Stan Shipley

The calibre of the boxer's body forms part of the spectacle.

André Rauch

Boxing gloves as we know them today, like most features connected with the sport, appear to have had their origin in ancient Greece (ca. 1500–1000 BC), where boxing instruction seems to have been a standard part of the education of boys. As well as sparring with each other, young Greek boxers also trained, as today, using punching bags, the ancient version of which was a leather sack filled with fig seeds and sand. They also seem to have used an equivalent to today's medicine ball: judging from an illustration in Hieronymus Mercurialis's *De arte gymnastica* (1573, 89), this seems to have been with the aim of strengthening boxers' hands and forearms as much as their abdominal muscles (figure 4). Mercurialis's engraving also shows both the Greek "hard" glove and fabric bandages or hand wraps like those worn by

today's boxers beneath their gloves. Leather thongs (*himantes*) were wrapped around their fists, wrists, and lower forearms, the thumb being left free and the fingers bound in such a way as to make clenching of the fist possible without strain (figures 6–8). In addition, for sparring sessions, young boxers wore headguards (*amphotides*) made of leather straps and ear lappets (circular leather pads), and it seems also that the Greeks developed a kind of gumshield or mouthguard. At this stage in boxing's development, protection of the head was particularly important since hitting below the neck was against the rules, and vertical chopping blows, using the whole arm (figure 3), as well as straight punching, were a key part of a boxer's arsenal (Grombach 1949, 193). Boxers fought naked, their bodies carefully oiled (figures 5–7), though some form of genital protector may have been worn by boxers in Crete. Boxing was one of the Olympic sports (the first Games took place in 770 BC), and basic rules seem to have been codified by one of the earliest Olympic boxing champions, Onomastos of Smyrna, in 688 BC: punching in the stomach was a foul and the contest would end either with a knockout or with the raising of a hand in capitulation by the defeated boxer. There were no weight divisions and no rounds. The aesthetic aspect of boxing seems already to have been appreciated among the Greeks, the boxer's movements being connected with those of dance, with boxing scenes from 1100 BC already appearing as decorative motifs on Minoan vases (figures 5–7).

The detailed representation of boxers on Greek vases, sculpture, and in other works of art has enabled modern historians of the sport quite effectively to reconstruct the movement and technique of early boxing (figures 5–8). John V. Grombach (1949, 191–96) in particular has shown how the form and structure of the *caestus*, the early boxing glove, in its “soft” and “hard” forms, as it appeared on statues and other reliefs, indicates the kind of blows and punches normally thrown by boxers in the Greek and Roman periods. In the earlier soft glove (figure 6), the wrapping of the knuckles with leather thongs was already thicker than that of other parts of the hand and wrist, indicating that straight punches with the fist as well as the wilder swinging and chopping blows were already being perfected. In the Hellenic and Olympic periods, with the development of championship boxing in front of large audiences, a harder glove (figures 7, 8) was developed in which the leather wrapping extended up the forearm, ending in a band of fur, and the hitting

surface of the fist was strengthened by the addition of three thick circular bands of leather (*sphairai*) over the second joints of the four fingers (figure 7, 8). The effect of this was to provide both greater weight and protection to the fist, enhancing the latter's power and enabling something more like the modern range of straight punches and hooks to be thrown. The head was still the main target in boxing during the Greek period, body blows and above-the-belt hitting becoming more common practice only with the Romans. This led to the generally lower guard of Roman boxers, in part necessitated by the extra weight of the *caestus*, which in professional or amphitheater contests was loaded with bits of lead or iron spikes (figures 2, 3). However, to maximize the effect of the leaded *caestus*, Roman boxers also threw heavy chopping blows from a raised arm (figure 3).

The classic defensive stance of the boxer also seems to have its origins in Greek boxing practice, with the left foot well forward and the left arm extended to ward off the opponent's right fist and to provide a measure for the right hand to follow through with a half or full swing (figures 5–7). The development of more varied patterns of defense had to wait until the shortening and straightening of punches, facilitated by the refinement of the *caestus*, and led in the later Greek period to the development of the blocking, parrying, and countering techniques that are essential to the sport in its modern form. Swings and haymakers, especially in conjunction with the use in Roman times of the lead-loaded *caestus* or the Etruscan use of the *myrmex*, or metal limb-piercer, meant, however, that on the whole, boxing in the later classical period was a cruder and more violent sport than it is today (figure 3). With fewer moves and lethally loaded gloves, a match's outcome was, in those days, determined by strength and courage as much as by skill and agility.

Considerable impetus to the refinement of boxing in the early modern period was a function of fencing's impact on the development of boxing technique. In eighteenth-century England, fencing and boxing were often taught by the same masters, who discovered, as Grombach (1949, 200) has explained, that, like the lunge or thrust in fencing, the straight punch in boxing was the shortest and quickest route to the target and also that both moves provided defense against cuts or swings from the side. Similarly, the basic boxing stance was refined as a mirror image of the "on guard" position in fencing, with the boxer's right fist balancing the more extended left just as the

fencer's withdrawn left hand balanced his extended right or sword hand. The on guard stance was thereafter generally adopted by prizefighters and is shown in many illustrations of the period, such as those of Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827, figure 11), Théodore Géricault (1791–1824, figure 12) and Gustave Doré (1833–83, figure 13). The Géricault print illustrates the 1811 fight between the black American boxer Tom Molineaux and the English champion Tom Cribb. The example of fencing enabled boxing technique, in relation to speed and agility of movement as well as to punching and parrying, to develop at a rate faster than at any time in its previous history.

This process was further accelerated by the publication of treatises on boxing and by the opening of boxing academies. Captain John Godfrey's treatise of 1747 was one of the most cogent and scientific, already confidently adapting the terminology of modern physics.¹ The most famous of the academies was that of John Broughton, the father of modern boxing, who as well as opening a boxing school in Oxford Road in London drew up in 1743 the first modern *Rules of the Ring* and introduced muffers or gloves (also known as "broughtons") for boxing training (figure 9). The early gloves were made of chamois leather or kid and stuffed with Indian grass or hair. As many commentators have emphasized, the importance of the reintroduction of boxing gloves can scarcely be overestimated. Saving boxing novices (as an advertisement for Broughton's Academy affirmed) the "Inconvenience of Black Eyes, Broken Jaws and Bloody Noses," Broughton's muffers made possible a relatively safe form of boxing training and thus opened the sport up in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to schools and colleges, to gentlemen such as the poet John Keats or nobles such as Lord Byron, and to prizefighters. Gloves were not adopted in professional competition, however, until the late 1800s, the modern leather boxing glove, stuffed with horsehair, appearing in 1883. The question of whether the use of gloves thereafter in professional boxing hardened or softened the sport has, as we saw in chapter 1, never been fully resolved.

With fighters such as Jack Johnson, John L. Sullivan, and James J. Corbett, prizefighting became, from the mid to late nineteenth century, transformed into boxing, and, as a part of mass culture, was appreciated increasingly for its scientific and aesthetic qualities (see Early 1994, 9). This development accompanied the revision of the London Prize Ring Rules in 1853 and in 1866,

and the drawing up in 1865–66 and the adoption in 1892 of the Queensbury Rules, with their clear demarcation of the ring and those allowed access to it, fixing of round and interval lengths, definition of acceptable practices, and so on.² The 1891 establishment in London of the National Sporting Club, at which many of the most memorable matches in boxing history took place, was another landmark, its influence in the normalization of boxing practice and ethos extending throughout the world—in particular to America, which would in the next century supersede England as the leading boxing country. The standardization in the 1880s and 1890s of the use in both professional and amateur bouts of gloves was accompanied by the regularization of boxing attire. Professional boxers fought stripped to the waist (a singlet or vest being worn by amateurs), the breeches worn by prizefighters (figures 10–13) being shortened to become trunks, with ankle-high boxing boots replacing shoes (figure 14). The short haircut, introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century to discourage hair grabbing (a practice only later outlawed in the London Prize Ring Rules) became standard, boxers thus being recognized, like their prizefighter forbears, as members of the “short-haired fraternity.” All these developments marked an important stage in the regularization of boxing and in its visual transparency at the moment when it became transformed into a respectable popular sport, the social implications of which are well investigated by Stan Shipley (in Mason 1989, 78–113). Already in the 1890s boxing matches were being filmed (as in the James J. Corbett–Peter Courtney match in New Jersey in 1894, using Edison’s kine-scope), a development that in the twentieth century further enhanced the sport’s visual and aesthetic aspect.

It was with the coming to mass audiences of Hollywood movies in the 1920s that the simple apparel of professional boxers became glamorized. The use of satin as opposed to cotton or jersey for shorts or trunks, with wide gathered or elasticated waistbands, seems to have been motivated by both aesthetic and practical motives. Boxing shorts had to be well cut and to extend well down the thigh to conceal the jockstrap and abdominal guard (introduced in 1930) worn beneath, and to provide ease and elegance of movement. At the same time the satin material added a touch of feminine glamour both to the state of purposeful undress of the boxer and to the otherwise relentlessly masculine ethos of the sport, the shine of the fabric being picked up

and reflected by the spotlights trained down onto the boxing ring (figures 14, 18). Boxing boots in black leather with various lace-up patterns, worn over white socks, gave a finishing touch to the boxer's outfit, one whose Spartan economy was offset only by the extravagance of a huge, often personally initialed, satin dressing gown, of a style scarcely different from what one might find in a female star's dressing room (figures 15, 16). In many ways from the 1920s to the 1950s, boxers were the male (and male-orientated) equivalent of the primarily female-orientated Hollywood stars, and boxing matches, like movie shows, became a primarily evening entertainment. As Early suggests, "prizefighters and white Hollywood actresses [became] the kings and queens of popular American culture" (1994, 23).

A curious paradox seems to have regulated the color of boxing trunks in the golden age period of the 1920s to 1940s (which was also the radio age, this medium first being used in the United States to broadcast commentary on the Jack Dempsey–Jess Willard fight in Toledo, Ohio, in 1919). Boxers in New York State were usually required to wear trunks of black or purple satin (figure 18), in both cases to hide blood stains. However, with the coming of television (the first boxing matches to be broadcast on TV were by the BBC in the late 1930s, followed soon after in America in the 1940s), a clear distinction between light shorts in one corner and dark in the other became necessary (figure 14). So in the 1947 Cerdan–Abrams fight in New York, Marcel Cerdan, the French boxer, boyfriend of another showbiz personality, Edith Piaf, was assigned black trunks with white waistband and white stripes down the sides, while George Abrams wore white trunks with black waistband and stripes. The purpose of this was to facilitate visual identification of the boxers by the television viewers. It is worth noticing that one of the most glamorous boxers of all, Cassius Clay–Muhammad Ali, tended to set off his darker skin by wearing white trunks and boots (figure 19), the latter becoming popularized as a fashion item as much as sporting apparel in the 1960s, and again in the early twenty-first century. However, with the coming of color television, and an increasing desire to avoid any racist implications—both developments of the 1960s and 1970s—the black and white corner and corresponding shorts color distinction became increasingly replaced from that time on by blue and red (see Toole 2000, 124), in particular in amateur boxing.

Further insight into how the intrinsic potential glamour of boxing gear

later became exteriorized and popularized through fashion is given by recent labeling and clothing trends. So the advertisement by boxing trunks from the 1920s onward of their manufacturer by a label worn *outside* on the *front* instead of inside on the back (the effect is that of shorts worn inside out), as indeed on the wristband of the boxing gloves, was a mark of daring ostentation that has been picked up and copied in recent fashion design, whether for sports gear or street clothes. Similarly, the adoption from the 1960s of the boxer short as standard male underwear also attests to the masculine glamour potential of boxing apparel (figure 17). As if to differentiate itself from this latter domestication, modern boxing shorts have tended to grow progressively longer, extending as far as or even beyond the Bermuda short length (that is, below the knee), and are now decorated by a totally unregulated range of feminine tassels and fringes (figure 20) more suited a 1920s Hollywood movie queen than to the boxing ring. As we shall see, Shelley MacDonald (2000) gives a provocative psychoanalytical account of how the boxing ring as a female space is taken possession of by the boxer as phallic male.

These developments show how the boxer's stance and body have become progressively more legible and glamorized, first in the interests of visualization by mass audiences, and second as a function of media projection itself, to the extent that today the latter as much as the intrinsic rules of the game seem to govern both the sport's motivation and reception. Indeed the very reality of the boxing encounter is increasingly under threat as close-ups, action replay, slow-motion shots, and other kinds of televisual analysis substitute an eyewitness perspective for a programmed reconstitution of the action. Accusations of voyeurism leveled against boxing (e.g., Oates 1987), according to which the viewer's prurient fascination is stimulated by the often bloody combat initiated by the two contestants, becomes perhaps more understandable when the prying eyes of the camera focus on or replay the more gut-wrenching or intimate moments of the action and the concomitant mental anguish or physical injury. Too much or too close visibility in the human sphere, in particular in moments of physical combat or intimacy, undoubtedly verges on the obscene, and this point certainly seems to have been reached in current televisual transmission of boxing. In addition, the fighting technique of the boxers themselves has become influenced

by the knowledge of the way it is presented, the emphasis on big blows and knockouts perhaps giving less opportunity to display other, less spectacular though nonetheless telling, boxing skills. This development is reflected in the relative shift from the traditional British boxing stance, with its upright posture and straight left (see Shipley 1989, 98) to the squarer, more face-on American stance, adopted by some American boxers, in particular the “peek-a-boo” stance of the Cus d’Amato school. A further questionable development is the use at the boxing venue itself of the large monitor screen simultaneously relaying the action, which has the effect of diverting the viewer’s attention from the actual event, however imperfectly perceived, to the edited, large-scale version of it. A recent giant photo by Andreas Gursky (b. 1955) of a boxing match (“Klitschko,” 1999, approximately 7 by 9 feet) has been digitally manipulated to emphasize the presence of the media that relay the match both to the vast audience present at the scene and the millions who will view the same event on their TV screens. In this way boxing becomes, like many other forms of popular cultural action, increasingly a branch of cinema or showbiz, and so risks losing some of the particular fascination it exerted in pretelevision days (see Rauch 1992, 207–80).

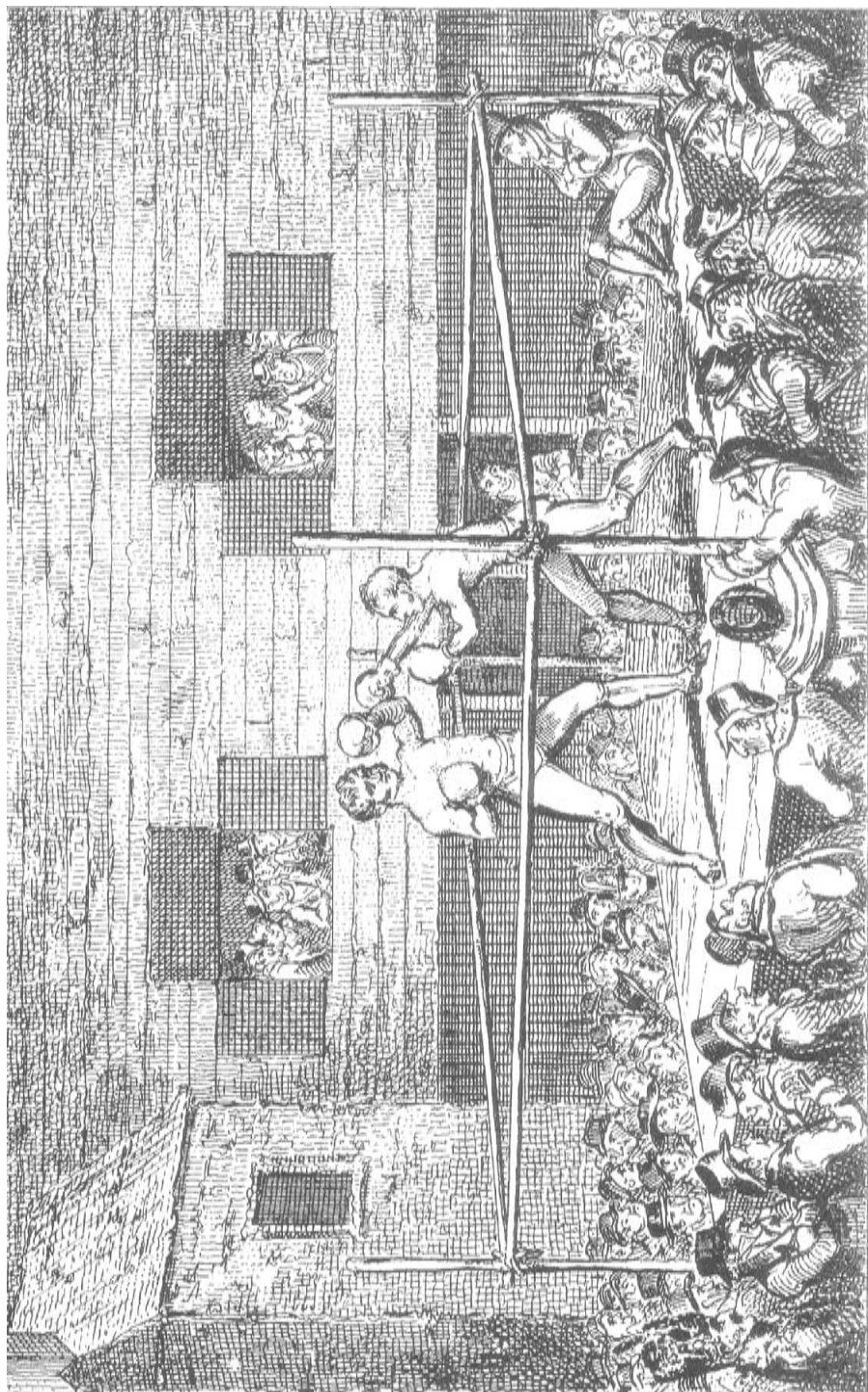


Figure 9. Isaac Richard Cruikshank (engraved by George Cruikshank),
A Sparring Match at the Fives Court, 1813. Courtesy of Trinity College Dublin Library.



Figure 10. Charles Rossi, *The British Pugilist*, marble, 1828.
Courtesy of Petworth House, Sussex, The National Trust.

Image Masked

Figure 11. Thomas Rowlandson, *The Prize Fight*, watercolor, 1787.
Reproduced by permission of the Yale Center for British Arts, Paul Mellon Collection (B1993.30.113).

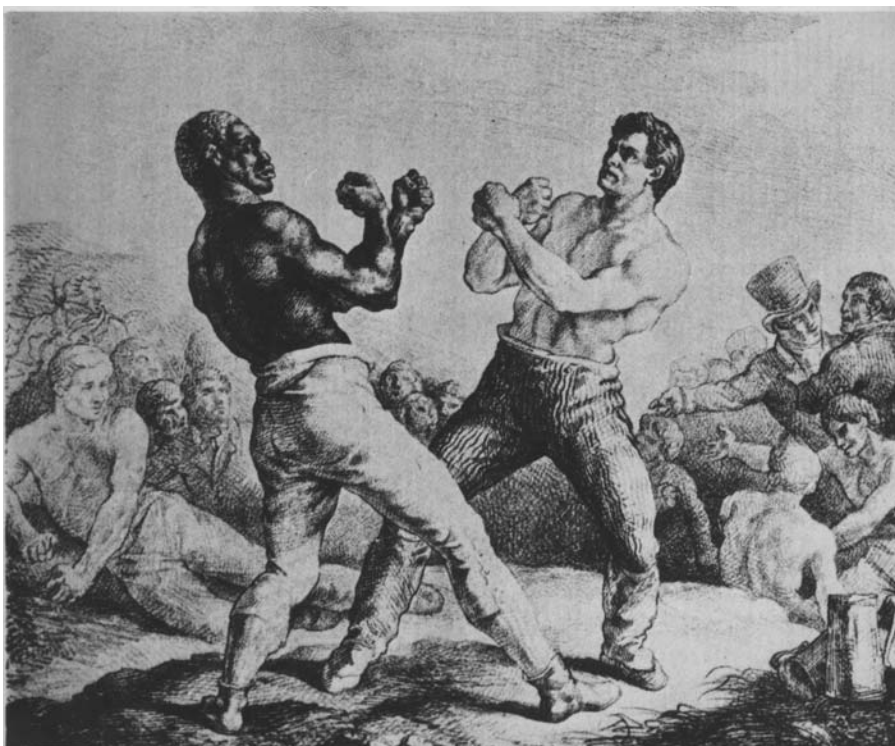


Figure 12. Théodore Géricault, *Boxing Match*, lithograph, ca. 1818.
Reproduced by permission of Bibliothèque nationale de France.

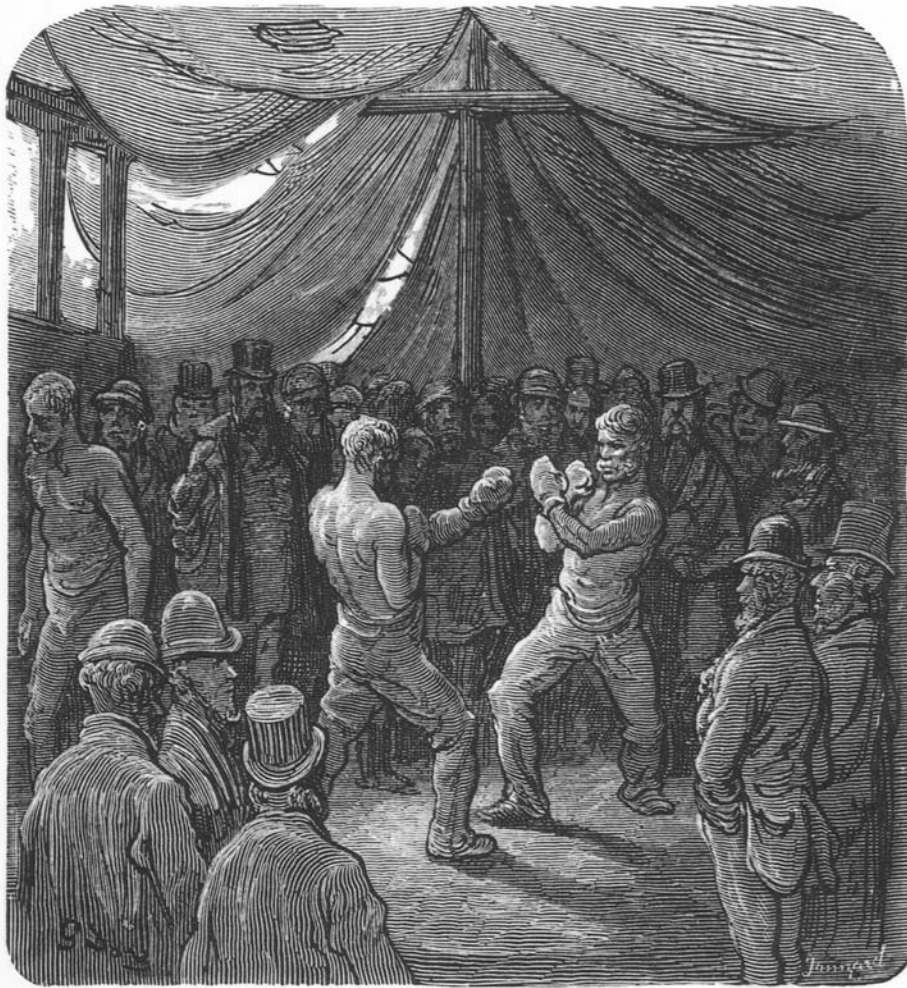


Figure 13. Gustave Doré, *The Prize Fight*,
wood-block engraving from *London: A Pilgrimage*, 1872.
Courtesy of Trinity College Dublin Library.



Figure 14. Rocky Marciano–Rex Layne, July 12, 1951. Photo by Charles Hoff.



Figure 15. Jack Dempsey (right) versus Luis Angelo Firpo (left), Polo Grounds, New York, 1923.
Photo originally printed in *The Ring* magazine.



Figure 16. Mickey Walker (left) versus Young Corbett III (right), 1934.
Originally printed in *The Ring* magazine.



Figure 17. Sugar Ray Robinson in training gear.
Reproduced in Peter Brooke-Ball, *The Boxing Album:
An Illustrated History* (London: Hermes House, 2004), 83.

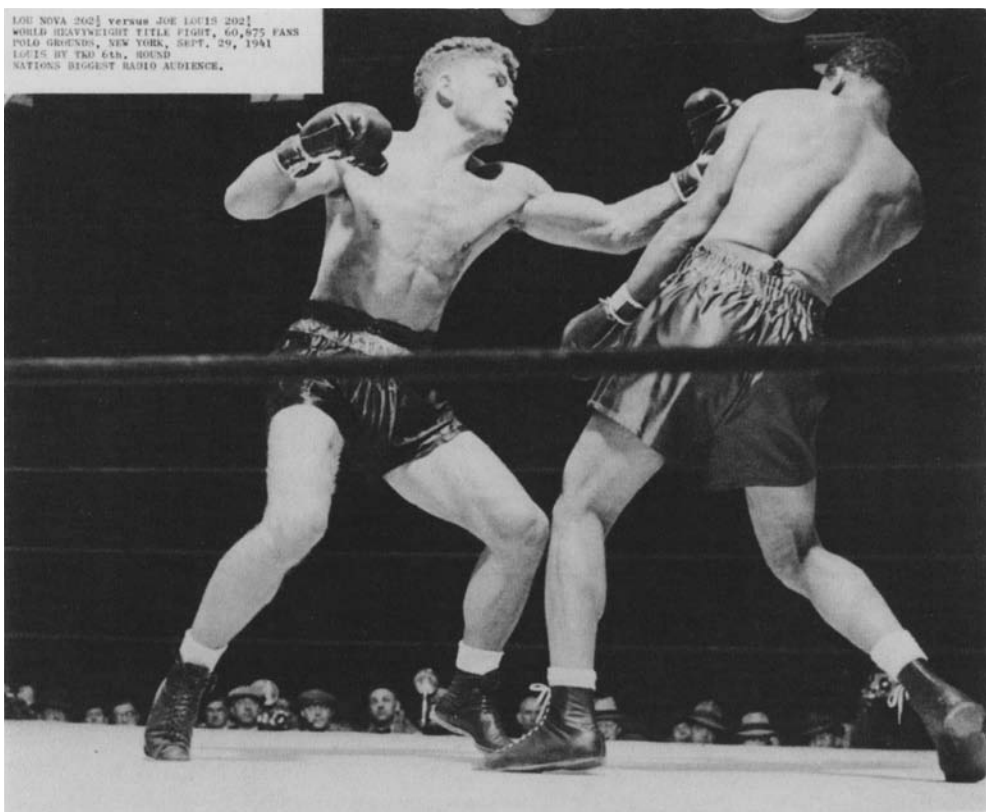


Figure 18. Lou Nova–Joe Louis, Polo Grounds, New York, 1941.
Originally printed in *The Ring* magazine.



Figure 19. Muhammad Ali–Sonny Liston, May 25, 1965.
Originally printed in *The Ring* magazine.



Figure 20. Naseem Hamed–Manuel Medina, Dublin, 1996.
Originally printed in *Allsport* magazine.

3. The Ring and the Ropes

The boxer's attempt is to obliterate all other objects and take up exclusive residence of the ring.

Shelley G. MacDonald

The ring is a place of order in an otherwise shifting social milieu.

John Sugden

Within the ropes there is more possibility of purity and equality than anywhere else I know.

Robert Anasi

Entering the ring is the central event of a boxer's life, the act that separates pugilist from gym dabbler, the moment when a boxer is poised between a lifetime of preparation and a world of hurt.

Carlo Rotella

The boxing ring is one of the most alluring and perturbing spaces in modern civilization. Few are the boxing writers with any active experience of the sport who do not comment on the complex, even contradictory, feelings of apprehension and elation they felt when stepping into it, while for the audience, on its raised platform, with its dazzling white or (more recently) blue canvas and enclosing ropes, the ring provides a focus for the gaze and a framework for the excitement to come that is probably unmatched in any other sport or entertainment. Much of this allure and anxiety is of course a function of projection: for the combatant, the ring is a theater of potential pain, exhaustion, and danger, while at the same time it offers the possibility of victory and correspondingly (and in varying degrees) fame and fortune. It is blank sheet on which a chapter in a sporting career, a destiny, or even a

life may be about to be written. For the audience, it is a theater in which an unscripted play will be enacted, within conventional rules, and yet with an outcome nobody can predict with certainty. It is a contest in which either combatant may have invested in him monetary, ethnic, national, cultural, or other symbolic values, yet in which at the same time allegiances may change as a function of the match's progression. The reigning champion may give way to the underdog or the outsider usurp a championship crown. A particular paradox of the space is that it is both a place of order and of potentially chaotic action. Its geometric shape, ropes, canvas surface, and raised position mark it out as a highly visible and regulated space, but the action that will take place in it will describe parabolas of movement, shifting of stance, chaotic flurries of action, and a denouement that may be as devastating as it is unforeseeable. Although from a sociological perspective, the boxing ring, like the gym, provides a site for the controlled release of aggression that might otherwise irrupt into the street, it also offers, from a psychological point of view, an outlet for a display of violent and aggressive action. The interaction of these two tendencies—controlling on one hand, releasing on the other—creates the special tension and excitement that is inseparable from the boxing experience.

The boxing ring as we know it today began to take on its definitive shape in the early nineteenth century. The London Prize Ring Rules of 1838 stated:

That the ring shall be made on turf, and shall be four-and-twenty feet square, formed of eight stakes and ropes, the latter extending in double lines, the uppermost line being four feet from the ground, the lower two feet from the ground. That in the centre of the ring a mark be formed, to be termed a scratch; and that at two opposite corners, as may be selected, spaces be enclosed by other marks sufficiently large for the reception of the seconds and bottle-holders, to be entitled the "corners."

Soon after this date, the ring was raised onto a low platform, canvas replaced turf, and the scratch and corner marks were dispensed with, as was the presence of seconds in the ring. The key development in boxing ring design, however, one contemporary with and as momentous as that of the use of leather boxing gloves in professional as well as amateur fights, was the reduction in the last two decades of the nineteenth century of the number of posts from eight to four and the institution of three as opposed to two ropes. Most significant of all was the setting up of the ropes as a kind of elasticated trapezoid

suspended a short distance inside the four corner posts which were now padded. In this way a new dynamic was added to ring movement: the ropes, having a certain degree of “give,” could be bounced off or backed into; more than just a line of demarcation, they became a dynamic element in ring strategy and could be used in a variety of attacking and defensive ploys (figures 23, 24). Both a potential trap—having one’s “back against the ropes” has become a general term for finding oneself in an extremely difficult situation—and a possible aid to counterattack, the flexible ropes of the modern ring express both the containing and the expansive potential of the boxing encounter, offering masters of ring-craft such as Muhammad Ali options unthinkable in earlier boxing arenas.

The famous “rope-a-dope” tactic Ali used against Foreman in the famous Zaire encounter of 1974 is a case in point, perfectly exemplifying the role of the ropes in boxing ring-craft. The process is vividly explicated by another great heavyweight boxer who was on the scene, Archie Moore, in conversation here with George Plimpton:

“Ah, but George did not really have Ali on the ropes,” Moore said. “Ali put himself there, which is quite different, and so you can say that he was following the tradition of the great rope fighters . . .”

“Rope fighters?”

“Like Young Jack Thompson, a good welterweight champion back in the twenties, who I hear tell used the ropes like a spider, skittering along them.”

Moore cleared his throat. I knew from experience that he had an analogy to offer.

“Ali swayed so far back on the ropes that it was like he was sitting in an old convertible Cadillac. The fifty-four model,” he added, being very accurate about such things. “Now, George tried to enter from the side doors. But they were shut. So George began to bang at them, hitting Ali’s arms that had the elbows protecting his hips, on up to the gloves protecting the lower mandible. On occasion George struck Ali some tremendous blows on the upper cranium, causing Ali no little discomfiture. But Ali weathered that and he cunningly convinced George that he could not punch and other nonsensical things, until George began to behave like he actually believed it, until this tremendous puncher lost his power from punching at that Cadillac’s doors, and he turned from an atomic force into a firecracker. In short,” said the great ex-fighter, “as they say in the idiom of Brooklyn, he blew his cool.” (Plimpton 1977, 338)

In his version of this memorable encounter in *The Fight* (1976), Norman

Mailer, in a chapter entitled “The Man in the Rigging,” describes how Ali seems to have been able to deflect some of the awesome power of Foreman’s punches through his body along the ropes of the ring, using their flexibility to attenuate, at least to some degree, the force of the blows received. As both Moore and Mailer stress however, Ali’s tactic was perhaps as much a psychological bluff as a physical ploy—dangerous and courageous, but ultimately effective. Whatever the case, it illustrates the point that the boxing ring constitutes a psychological as well as a physical space in which mental tensions can be reflected in or resolved through the use of the ropes, corner posts, or other strategic points.

The psychological potential of the ropes can also be exploited by the boxer before or even after the match. Prince Naseem Hamed would regularly perform a somersault into the ring before his match (figure 21) in demonstration not only of his exceptional fitness and agility but also of his confidence and bravado. Making an entrance has of course always been, since the initiation of modern boxing practice (from the beginning of the so-called golden age in the 1920s), an important part of the psychological warfare of boxing, with the fighter’s march from the dressing room in aggressive cowl or ostentatious gown, accompanied by fanfare or loud music and a retinue of seconds and cornermen, becoming progressively more showy as the century developed. The winning boxer’s lordship of the ring is also sometimes expressed by his mounting of the ropes in triumph at the end of the match (figure 22).

Charles Hoff’s photos of the 1940s and ’50s wonderfully illustrate the complex physical and psychological potentiality of the containing yet expanding structure of the roped ring. In one photo, a pair of unidentified boxers are projected in a violent homoerotic embrace through the ropes, the entangled bodies no doubt in part unconsciously expressing the tangled emotional and physical feelings activated in the boxing encounter (figure 23). In another photo (1949), Robert Villemain, bracing himself against the corner ropes, counters Jake LaMotta’s right hook with an extraordinary uppercut to the body, the photo wonderfully catching the kind of cat’s cradle-like network of ropes in which the boxers are caught up (figure 24). Here the camera’s instantaneity is able momentarily to capture the anarchic movements made and the almost unimaginable spatial configurations taken by the boxers’ bodies within the otherwise structured space of the ring.

While it has been male writers (very often former boxers) who have written about the ring most eloquently in terms of spatial relations, ring-craft, and tactics, it is women writers who have been more entranced by the psychological or psychoanalytical implications of the space of the boxing encounter, a space to which their response is often profoundly ambivalent. Shelley MacDonald (2000), fascinated by what she sees to be the male world of boxing as practiced by her grandfather, analyses the sport in terms of a phallic male desire, acted out unconsciously by the boxer, to reappropriate a feminine or even maternal space—that of the boxing ring—by asserting the law of his dominance over other male opposition. This is undoubtedly a suggestive thesis, supported by numerous unconscious features of boxing that have never been rationally accounted for—the boxer’s underwear-like apparel of satin (which counts as a feminine fabric), the reference to the “apron” of the boxing ring, the hovering white-clad figure of the Law in the form of the referee, not to mention the final aim of sending at least one participant in the scene back to a position of fetal unconsciousness. In this view, the ring becomes the theater of quasipsychotic action, a regression into a sphere of impossible desire for possession, the psychic motivation of which perhaps fuels the exceptional energy expended in close-fought boxing encounters.

A complementary take on boxing from a woman’s perspective is that of Oates (1987) to whom, as with MacDonald, the sport was introduced by a dominant male figure, in this case her father, a boxing correspondent who frequently took his daughter with him to boxing matches, and for whom once again the sport is a model of irresolvable ambivalence. Oates is particularly sensitive to the strong homoerotic charge implicit in the male encounter in the boxing ring with its quasinudity, sustained and systematic violence, and elaborate ritual (figures 23–27). Rather than the mother or the father (or Phallus), for Oates the boxing ring is a space of encounter with the self in which the boxer meets a dream (or nightmare) distortion of himself in which his weaknesses become the strengths of the other. In this way, the ring, in its geometrical symmetry with its matched opponents, becomes a mirror-like structure in which, for the duration of the bout, the boxer is trapped in a confrontation of self and other that can only be resolved by extreme violence. The shattering of the glass, the dispelling of the shadow-self, comes as the knockout blow, temporarily restoring the split consciousness to one as opposed to two centers, as one figure’s phallic verticality triumphs over

the horizontality of the other (figure 19). The phallic verticality of the victor is further stressed when a boxer mounts the ropes, as in figure 22, to crow his victory.

More recent insights into contemporary female attitudes toward boxing, from the point of view of active participation as opposed to passive observation, are provided by a growing corpus of female writers (Denfeld 1997 and Sekules 2000; also Rotella 2002, 13–50). What these insights in part reveal is that, despite the significance of gender difference, women's anxieties and elation in relation to boxing are remarkably similar to those of men: masculinity as a quality or a potentiality is not synonymous with "male" and is therefore as open to exploration from a female as from a male point of view. So, for example, Rene Denfeld is able, through boxing, to refine her conception of aggression and see that, far from being a purely male-gendered category, "it is a human condition, not confined to one sex" (1997, 11). As she says, "My experiences in the gym led me to question some of my most precious assumptions about aggression, and, in the process, about myself. A subject that had once seemed simple was increasingly revealed as full of shades and contradictions. It became harder simply to condemn all aggression. Such a perspective didn't seem to allow for the enormous differences between one kind of aggression and another, the purpose it serves, and what people get out of it" (6).

Similarly, Kate Sekules observes that the hunger to box is "related to the drive found in all athletes but that it has a distinctive flavor, and that it may not be so different in a man, except that women share discrete areas of additional pressure in this culture" (2001, 17). She goes on to write of the thrill of sparring: "It doesn't strike me as violent. I see it as an abstruse language that I know slightly as if I were in Tokyo after a year of Japanese lessons" (50). For women writers who are also boxers, the theoretical issues raised by boxing (psychological, social) addressed by Oates and MacDonald become thus complicated and nuanced by the emotional and visceral involvement of the sparring or fighting situation, leading to a more complex understanding of what is at stake in boxing and necessitating a productive rethinking of categories such as aggression and masculinity. Participation in boxing also enables them to develop a more nuanced understanding than that offered by Oates of the erotic aspect of the sport. For Denfeld, contact sports such as boxing promote a heightened physical awareness, a sensuality that is physically intense

without necessarily being sexual, a “form of eroticism that can occur without sexual arousal” (1997, 155). She adds that “the glow of warm pleasure from exercise is akin to the suffused relaxation following sex” (157). Similarly, Sekules observes how the physical contact between male boxers and their trainers is one of “easy familiarity, even intimacy,” one which now “without fanfare or special training” becomes the norm also for women boxers, one in which “there is no sexual content” (2001, 108).

Although women writers who have explored the physical and psychological space of the boxing ring tend, like Sekules, to assert its relative sexual neutrality, it is less easy, from a male perspective, to make a similar assertion. This is because the gender of the boxing ring as a space may be conceived to alter depending on that of the fighters inhabiting it. If for MacDonald the boxing ring is a feminine place appropriated by a male in a rite of masculine domination over his fellow or mirror image, for the female boxer the ring is a masculine space reappropriated in a liberating gesture by feminine action and aggression. When men dress up in glamorous and minimal garb to fight to appropriate a feminine space, however, an area of ambiguity seems to creep in. This may be due to the fundamentally ambivalent nature of male genetic makeup, with its xy chromosome structure¹ and its corresponding potentiality to realize attributes of both genders. Whatever the case, there is no denying the disturbing and seemingly erotic ambivalence of images of violence between males in the boxing ring (figures 23–27). In figure 23, two unidentified boxers project themselves through the ropes of the ring in a violent homoerotic embrace, while in the extraordinary clinch enacted by Willie Pepp and Sandie Saddler (figure 25), the expression on the face of the embraced boxer might as easily be read as ecstasy as agony. Meanwhile, in the violent confrontation in 1961 between Floyd Patterson and Ingmar Johansen (figure 27), the former appears to be leading the other in a gallant waltz across the ring before delivering the blow that will demolish his dancing partner. The expression of loving care Patterson seems to wear as he delivers the violent cuff to the back of his opponent’s head creates an image that is profoundly expressive of the unresolved ambivalences of the boxing situation, with its dramatization of the contradictory tendencies—active/passive, violent/tender, masculine/feminine—within the male psyche.

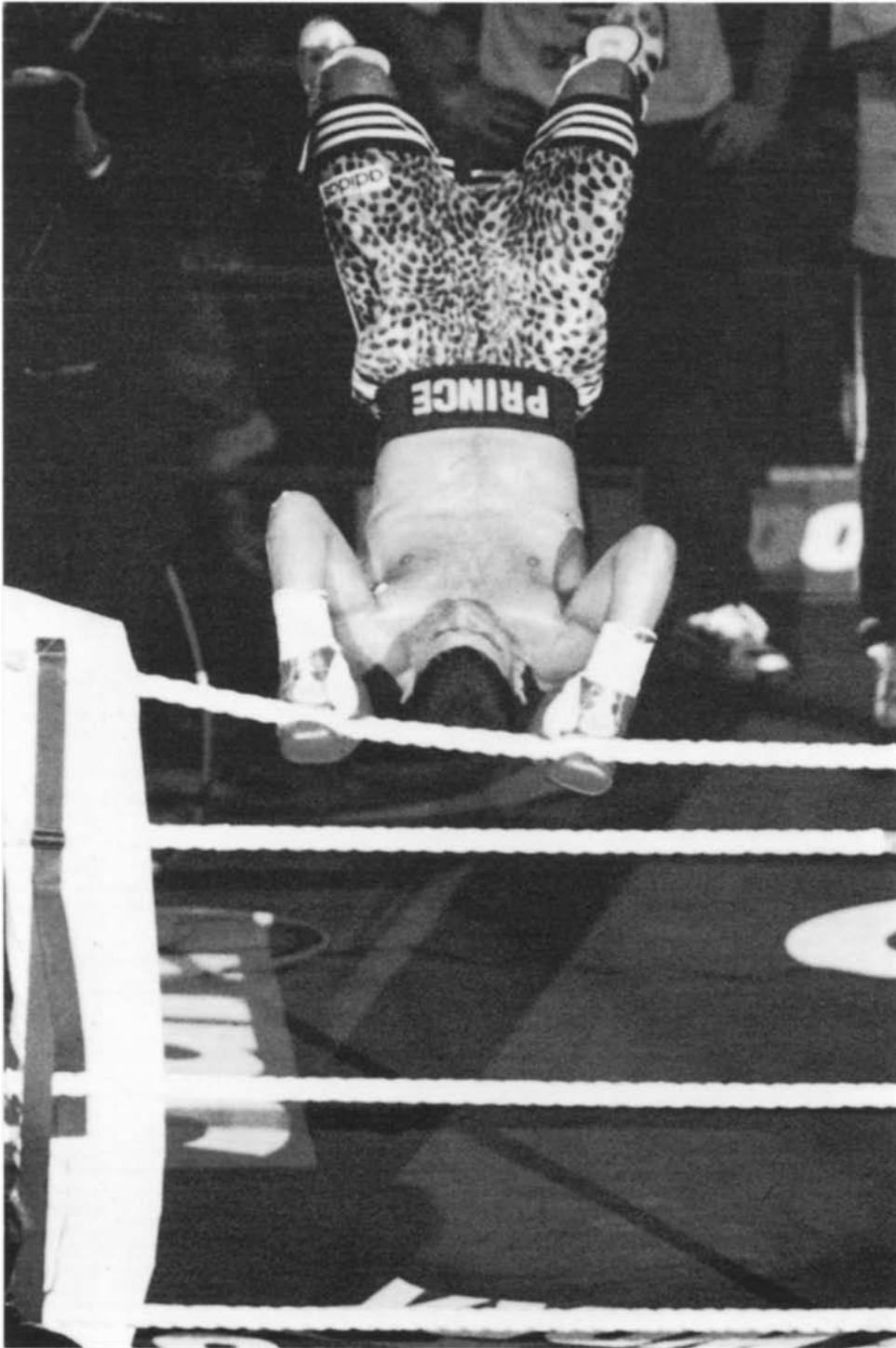


Figure 21. Naseem Hamed.
Photo by Neil Tingle, Action-Plus Photographic.



Figure 22. Unidentified boxer.
Originally printed in Arlene Schulman, *The Prizefighters* (London: Virgin, 1995), 95.

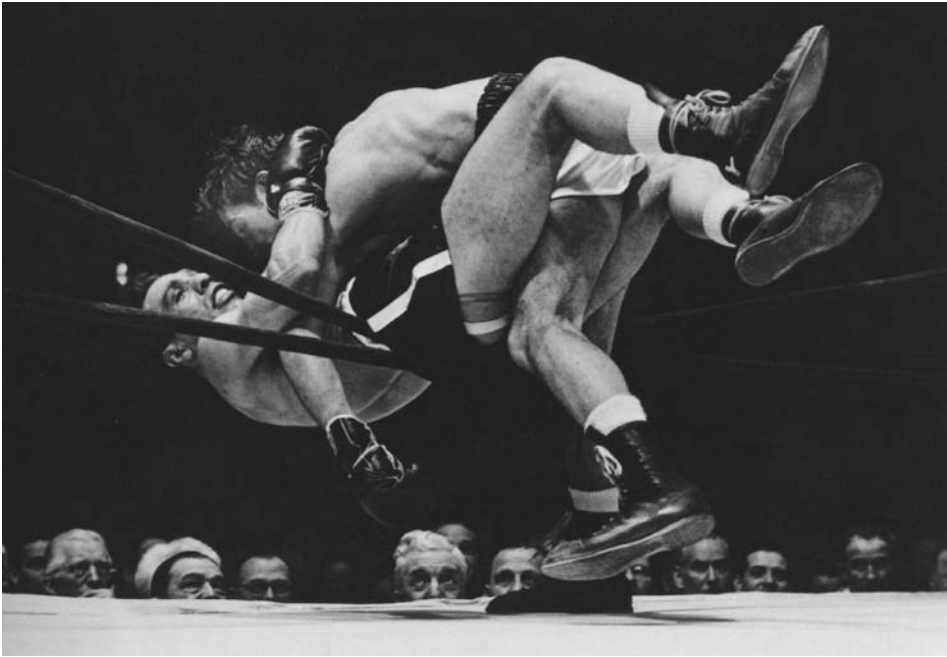


Figure 23. Unidentified boxers, ca. 1950.
Photo by Charles Hoff.

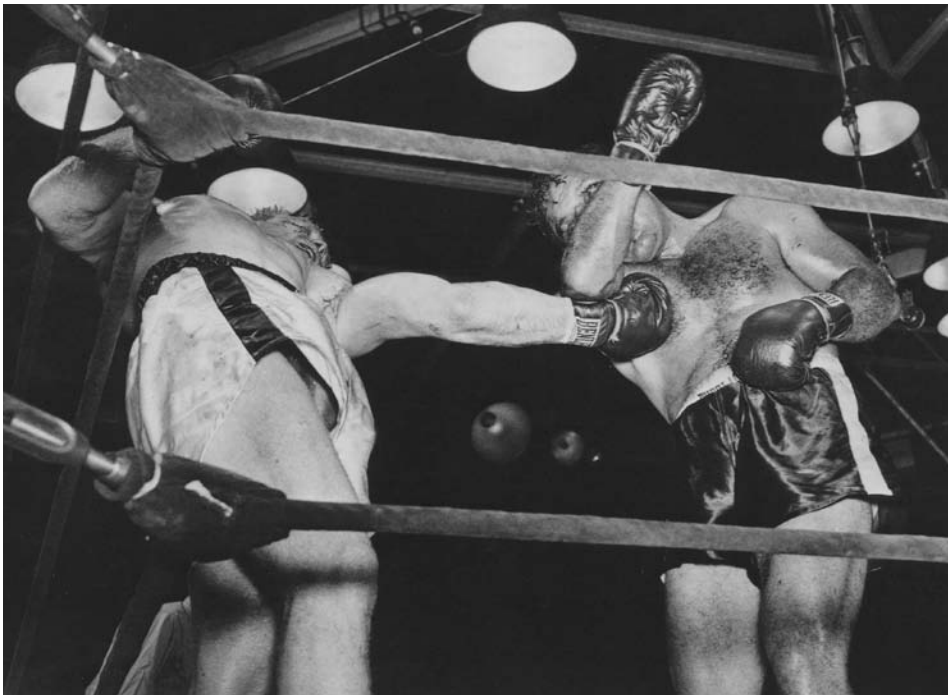


Figure 24. Robert Villemain–Jake La Motta, March 25, 1949.
Photo by Charles Hoff.



Figure 25. Willie Pepp–Sandy Saddler, October 29, 1948.
Originally printed in *The Ring* magazine.



Figure 26. Terry Norris–Carl Daniels, 1992.
Originally printed in *Allsport* magazine.

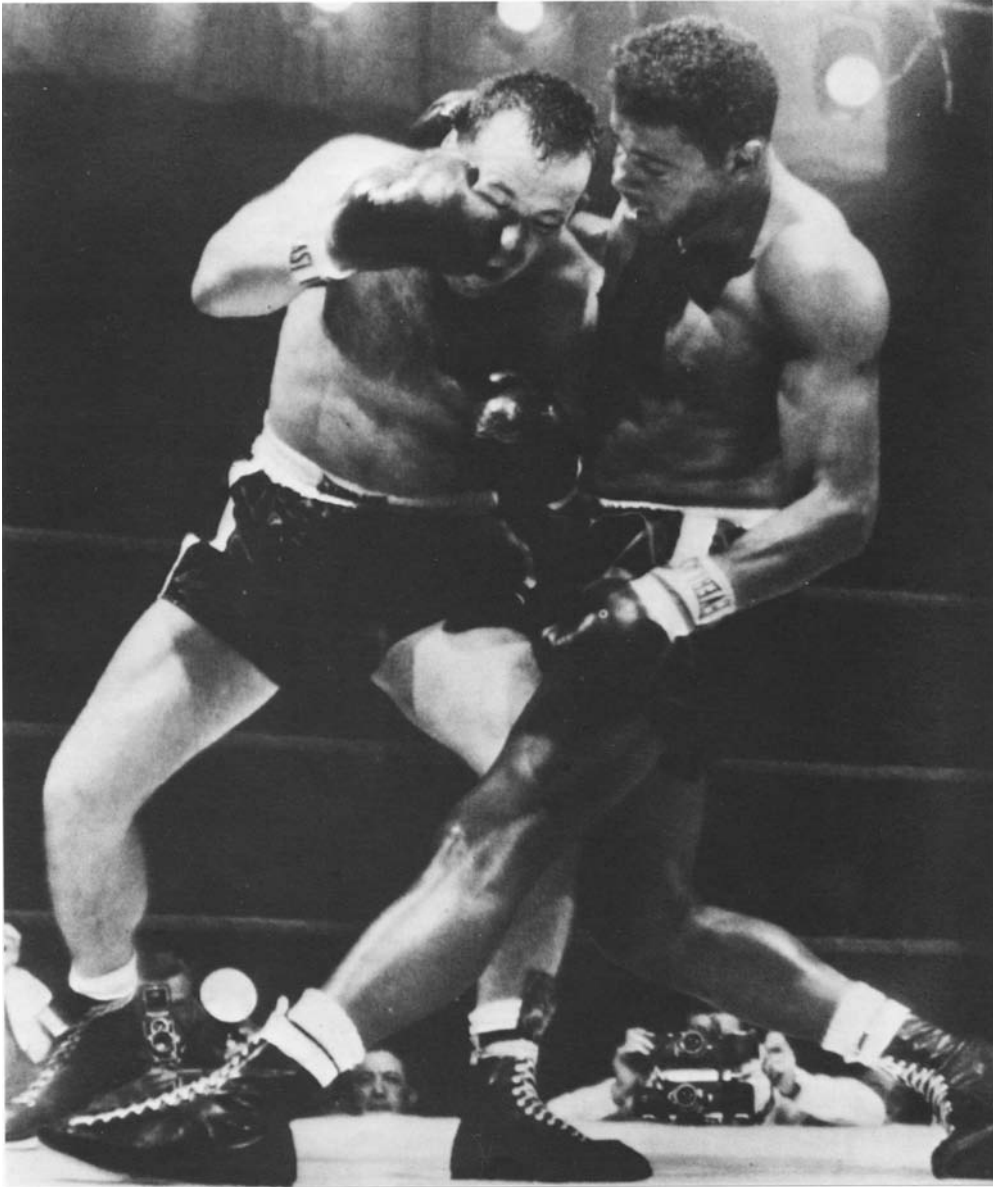


Figure 27. Floyd Patterson–Ingmar Johansson, March 13, 1961.
Originally printed in *The Ring* magazine.



The Art of Boxing

4. The Ring as Theater of Modernist Action

The picture lingers in my mind after the act itself is ended.

Irvin S. Cobb

The rise of sport as a mass entertainment seems roughly to have coincided with the development of cinema and other forms of cultural production toward the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. This development was fuelled by the emergence of new, machine-based sports such as cycling and motor racing (the Tour de France was initiated in 1903) and also by the revival of the Olympic Games in 1896, in which boxing was one of the traditional sports. The growth in interest in sport, and in boxing in particular, was the function in the early modern period of the support of a new urban industrial male working class whose wages were sufficient to allow a small balance for entertainment. As Stan Shipley puts it, in England “boxing became a popular spectator sport when unskilled and casual workers became able to afford sixpence regularly each week” (Mason 1989, 91). At the same time that boxing, especially in its amateur “small hall” form (see Mason 1989, 94) became popular among the working classes, it also became, in its professional form, promoted in the larger and especially the capital cities, a form of entertainment to which a certain prestige was attached, a continuation of that aristocratic interest that had done so much to promote prizefighting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition, as I suggested in chapter 2, by the beginning of professional boxing’s golden age (the 1920s to the 1940s), a masculine form of the feminine glamour associated with Hollywood cinema seems to have become firmly attached to boxing.

The exemplary status and enduring popularity of boxing as a sport seems to be a function of various factors. Associated with the Greeks, it has (unlike

the equally ancient sport of wrestling) always incorporated an aura of authentic heroism;⁴ at the same time, its appeal is essentially democratic (see Early 1994, 22): while widely supported among the urban working class, it was also a sport promoted in English public (upper-class) schools and colleges as a noble and character-building discipline. The particular compactness of the boxing ring lent itself well not only to live viewing but also to film and radio commentary, and later to television. The “black and white” nature of the sport—a winner and a loser, combatants in a mirror relationship with each other, the possibility of the knockout, black corner and white corner, black shorts and white shorts, intense white overhead lighting with the audience wreathed in obscurity—further added to its fascination. The intense visual stimulus the sport offered to the viewer along with its acute visceral impact also seems to have attracted twentieth-century artists, in particular those interested in new—more dynamic and challenging—forms of visual representation. In this context, the interest of futurist and cubist artists in boxing is understandable, particularly insofar as these movements were concerned to analyze the deeper, often dynamic structures underpinning objects and visual experience in the modern world.

The futurist conception of internal dynamics offers an illuminating insight into such preoccupations. For the leading futurist painter and sculptor, Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), for example, artistic representation, to be effective, had to include the dynamic as well as the static aspect of the object. Developing his theory of “plastic dynamism,” Boccioni stresses the importance of not separating the object from its environment. This is because for him plastic dynamism involved the combination of the absolute motion of the object with its relative motion, the transformation it undergoes in relation to its mobile or immobile environment. Boccioni’s theory reflects the futurist understanding of the need to introduce movement into the representation of objects in art, reflecting the new dynamism of twentieth-century life. Since Darwin’s development of an evolutionary theory in his *Origin of the Species* (1859), life was increasingly perceived as being an infinite succession of events; in modern life, with its machines promoting speed and rapid movement, this succession was progressively accelerating. The challenge to painter and sculptor became that of how to capture and express this dynamism in a static object. A set of new equations—object plus environment, body plus

movement, speed plus simultaneity—became the formulas governing futurist artistic representation in which a “force-form” derived from real form produced a new form defining objects and their driving force.² Such new forms would express both the intrinsic dynamism of the object and the actual dynamism of its interaction with mobile or immobile environment.

Boccioni's sculpture *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913; figure 29) provides a classic example both of the theory just outlined and of futurist expression of the latent energies of the boxer. This can be seen if Boccioni's figure is compared with the unidentified black boxer in Charles Hoff's photograph (figure 28) of the 1940s. In the latter, the black boxer has just floored his white opponent; he is waiting, fists cocked, to continue the onslaught, depending on whether his opponent manages (which in this case seems unlikely) to rise from the canvas. The readiness of his body is indicated by the tautness of muscles that run up his leg and back, as well as his raised fists. The bright overhead lights illuminating the boxing ring are reflected in the boxer's gloves, boots, dark shorts, and glistening dark skin, creating a bronzelike patina. His body is a picture of animal alertness and latent energy. The effect created by Boccioni's sculpture is remarkably similar. Here the impression of dynamic advance in the figure is enhanced by the way the potential forward movement of the legs and shoulders is indicated by the trailing flanges. As in an anatomical engraving by Andreas Vesalius (1514–64), in which the muscles of human limbs are unfolded from the skeletal structure for display and scientific analysis, so in Boccioni's sculpture the flesh and sinew of the body is displayed to enhance the viewer's understanding of its structural and dynamic qualities. The many-faceted undulations of the sculpture and the smooth finish of its surface reflect light in a way that further intensifies the life and energy the work exudes: glistening with perspiration, it seems, like the live boxer in Hoff's photo, to be in a state of dynamic readiness.

The concern with the dynamic potential of the static object is taken further by futurists in their focus on moving objects: cars, trains, animals, human forms, and, most famously, the fist (Balla, figure 30). Once again, sports such as boxing provide a perfect analogy to this conception, offering the example of a human body in constant motion within a controlled and framed environment. Boxing is about interaction of forces implicit in the human body. Boxing activates, dynamizes the potential of human movement within a relatively

circumscribed and therefore visible theater or frame, that of the boxing ring. The punch is the perfect dynamic expression of the fist; it involves a movement that draws on the dynamics of the boxer's body in its totality, the whole of the body weight being ideally transmitted through the arm and the fist to land on the opponent. Furthermore, the act of punching is performed in the circumscribed theater of the boxing ring in which action is viewed from all four sides, in other words, in an integral environment. Action is contained by the ropes, which add an extra dynamic to it while at the same time maximizing its visibility. Aspects of this dynamic are also illuminatingly illustrated by the futurist painter Giacomo Balla (1871–1958) with reference both to the theory and practice of Boccioni as artist and to the dynamics of the picture frame.

The preoccupation of Balla with Boccioni's fist, or more properly with *Force-lines of Boccioni's Fist* (ca. 1915) can be traced through a number of pencil and color crayon sketches, gouaches (figure 30), and even a sculpture made of red-painted cardboard.³ As with other futurist works, Balla's aim was to explore the dynamic potential of the object, analyzing in the process the lines of force intrinsic to it while at the same time attempting to express them in visual terms. A mixture of abstract and representational design in which the indexical vigor of the former outmaneuvers the iconic verisimilitude of the latter, Balla's fist drawings and sculpture attempt to present the object in its dynamic potential. The fist emerges as the straight right of a boxer moving dynamically forward, all the energy of the body, as in boxing, being directed into and through it as it punches its target. In some versions of the drawing, a red triangular form indicates the direction of the fist's force, representing in abstract form the tangible movement of the body. Like boxing as a sport, the fist is a symbol of both violence and control, combining propensities toward beauty and danger, potentialities that the futurists saw increasingly as interacting in dynamic tension in modern life. Balla's representations of Boccioni's fist have, as Fagiolo points out (1987, 110), both figurative and symbolic meanings. In one drawing, the fist, synonymous with futurism, attacks *passéisme* in the form of an old man (rendered in a parodic form of the realist style), while as a symbol, appearing as a letterhead on futurist writing paper, it becomes the logo of the movement, knocking out the past while punching its way both into public consciousness and into the future.

In another work by Balla, *Futurist Frame* (1927; figure 31), the energies implicit in the rectangle of the paper or canvas are expressed in the surrounding frame, a three-dimensional construct in which painted panels and batons of wood present in tangible form the dynamics inherent in the pictorial project.⁴ This frame was originally conceived to enclose a self-portrait of the artist himself, but it is in many ways a far more powerful construction when exhibited void of picture, as in various venues in Great Britain in 1987. This is because it allows the multiple potentialities of the picture plane to be imagined or fantasized by the viewer, the coloristic and sculptural qualities of the frame itself suggesting rhythms and dynamisms that have no need of further specific representation. The top left and bottom right corners of the frame incorporate triangles of white, and, in this way, already activate dynamic movement in the frame itself as the enclosed square also becomes stretched into a trapezoid, thus problematizing the exact whereabouts of the edge of the picture frame and introducing a kind of kinetic movement into the overall structure. Perhaps Boccioni's fist rather than Balla's self-portrait might have formed a more fitting subject for this frame since it seems to operate exactly like a boxing ring, that is, as a simultaneously stable but flexible 3-D device for enclosing, promoting, and expanding action within its bounds. Indeed the disposition of the batons, painted as is often the case with the ropes of the boxing ring, in three different colors (red, white, and blue) seem like a schematic representation of the guard ropes as they bend and stretch under the impact of the boxers' bodies, the rounded and geometrical forms extending beyond them perhaps representing further vectors of bodily movement or of the trajectory of punches. In any case, it is remarkable to observe how cubist, constructivist, or art deco presentations of the boxing ring, almost exactly contemporary to Balla's frame, exploit the same trapezoidal dynamic and the same concern with the periphery as much as with the (often blank) center of the work.

Within a cubist conception of art, boxing as a sport takes on a status similarly exemplary to that suggested in some futurist works. This is because it facilitates real perception of movement and simultaneity of action. First, movement: the relative codification and stylization of boxing moves—basic stance; six main styles of punch (left jab, straight right, left hook, right hook, left uppercut, right uppercut); frequent repetition of similar moves; symmetrical

interaction of boxers, striking, and parrying; and boxers operating in mirror-image-like relationship with each other. Second, simultaneity: the close proximity of two boxers in a schematic cube of space in which two or more angles are simultaneously perceptible. The boxers in the ring, or more properly cube, are viewable from all angles simultaneously as they activate various circling and interacting movements within the ring/cube. The strobeflike effect created by ropes as seen by the viewer at the ringside further activates the dynamic aspect of the boxing encounter.

The painting *Boxing Match* of around 1930 (figure 32) by the Paris-based art deco painter Milivoy Uzelac (1897–1977) exemplifies, in slightly diluted form, many characteristics of representation in cubist art. Uzelac takes boxing ring, boxers, referee, cornermen, audience (including a couple of swells in full evening dress), journalists, announcer, and film cameraman and creates a cubist interaction of their various responses. The image is cubist in the way separate components overlap with each other and in the way some of the various components are arranged in expressive juxtaposition rather than conventionally verisimilar coordination. Thus we see, as in cubist painting, static objects, or fragments of objects, disposed in an array that is decorative and expressive rather than strictly realistic, just as, at such a real encounter, the occasionally distracted eye of the viewer notices details of the scene in no particular logical or functional order. So loudspeaker, stool, bowl, sponge, typewriter, film camera, and round marker notice are disposed around the object of central attention, the ring. Similarly, the mixture, as in cubism, of styles of representation expresses the differing levels of attention the observer devotes to the various visual, aural, or tactile impressions offered by the scene: for dimly perceived objects, such as the film camera and cameraman, we get a mere outline; for other members of the audience, mere silhouettes; areas of pure color express our varying degree of awareness of light and shadow; schematically represented figures (the boxers, the referee) command our full attention; while fully represented figures (the glamorous couple of swells) become rivals for our attention to the main event.

As befits a cubist (or even futurist) painting, the composition of Uzelac's gouache is essentially dynamic: angled panels surrounding a central ring placed not square-on but dynamically, as an asymmetrical diamond shape (as in Balla's *Picture Frame*). Movement is directed into and out of the picture frame. The body of the kayoed boxer, spread-eagled, and that of the referee

(who is simultaneously indicating with one arm to the winning boxer to stay in his corner and with the other counting out the floored opponent) act as indexes of the dynamics implicit both in the match and in the composition. The loudspeakers top left blare the weights of the boxers (both are heavyweights at 89 kilos) into the arena. The effect of the spotlights' light and shade is reproduced by pure splurges of color (pure white and powder blue) that descend into the ring at angles, the maximum intensity of light being reflected by the white-clad figure of the referee in a position of asymmetrical centrality in the ring. The treatment of the only straight lines in the composition—those that mark the ropes of the ring—is also telling: they are tautly traced in, being most fully articulated on the side nearest the picture's viewer, appearing more sketchy on the far side. The way the ring is stretched into an asymmetrical trapezoid at the corner in which the upright boxer awaits the final countdown is wonderfully expressive of the pressure his body exerts against the ropes on which he is leaning. It also suggests the dynamic, catapulting action the ropes will have if the boxer is instructed to leap forward to finish off his opponent if the latter survives the count-out. The obscurity and weight of that corner of the ring is enhanced by the angle of shadow that frames the waiting boxer, the tension of the moment being enhanced by the sketchy but clearly agog stance of the viewers seated behind the upright boxer, craning their necks to see the final outcome of the match. In the opposite corner of the picture, in the press rows of the stadium, several pairs of disembodied arms clack feverishly at the rows of typewriters, expressing in their fragmentary feverishness the excitement of recording what appears to be a knockout victory. Meanwhile, in the same corner, the sponge, water bottle, bucket, and towel that will be needed to revive the fallen boxer are positioned at the ready in the bottom left corner, next to the waiting cornermen.

A roughly contemporary linguistic equivalent to this sort of cubistic or futurist representation of a knockout situation in boxing is offered by Irvin S. Cobb in his account in "Cobb fights it over" of Jack Dempsey's knockout defeat of Georges Carpentier at Boyle's Thirty Acres open stadium in Jersey City in 1921:

The picture lingers in my mind after the act itself is ended. Behind Dempsey is a dim background of gray clouds, swollen and gross with unspilt rain. The snowy white horizontals of the padded guard ropes cut across him at knee and hip and shoulder line;

otherwise his figure stands out clear, a relaxed, knobby figure, with tons of unexpended energy still held in reserve within it. The referee is close at hand, tolling off the inexorable tally of the count — “seven, eight, nine” — but scarcely is one cognizant of the referee’s presence or of his arithmetic either. I see only that gnarled form lolling against the ropes and, eight feet away the slighter, crumpled shape of the beaten Frenchman, with its kicking legs and its sobbing mouth, from which a little stream of blood runs down upon the lolled chin.

In a hush which instantaneously descends and as instantaneously is ended, the referee swings his arm down like a semaphore and chants out “ten.”

The rest is a muddle and mass of confusion. (Cox 1936, 168–89)

Here, apart from the background of the open sky, the writer’s attention is focused entirely within the framework of the ring, beyond which all is a “muddle and mass of confusion.” The “snowy white horizontals of the padded guard ropes” define both the theater of action and the position of the triumphant Dempsey, lolling like the victorious boxer in Uzelac’s painting, in the far corner of the ring. The “plastic dynamism” of the champion boxer’s body “with tons of unexpended energy still held in reserve within it” contrasts with that of his defeated opponent, which lies as a “crumpled shape,” a spent object rather than a dynamic human form, its last traces of energy being expended in the feebly kicking feet and the trickle of blood from the battered mouth. The slowing of time as the count-out proceeds leads to an eerie silence, which, at the count of ten, is shatteringly broken. The semaphore action of the referee’s arm as he swings it downward to mark the knock-out and thus the end of the contest is exactly equivalent to that of the white figure at the center of Uzelac’s gouache, the finality of the moment being expressed in the referee’s tensed body, which in both text and picture stands in graphic contrast to the limp cruciform shape of the floored boxer. Overall this passage, in its combination of mechanistic calibration (the triple ropes of the ring cutting across Dempsey’s body, the arithmetical countdown, the final semaphore gesture) with organic, dynamic energy (the potent figure of Dempsey gathering his awesome strength in the corner of the ring) perfectly expresses the tension between object and environment, body and movement, machine and organism that were in varying degrees central preoccupations in futurist and cubist art.

A more schematic but nonetheless effective expression of the analogy

between modernist art and boxing is provided by the constructivist posters of the Stenberg brothers—Vladimir (1899–1982) and Georgii (1900–33)—produced, like the other work discussed in this chapter, in the 1920s. In *The Punch* of 1926 (figure 33), created to advertise an American boxing film of 1921, also released under the title *Scrap Iron*, the frame of the boxing ring is itself ambiguously presented: is it the red wedge—reminiscent of the political posters of El Lissitzky (1890–1941) such as “Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge” of 1919—that descends from the top of the poster image, or the black trapezoid below it, against which the floored boxer sprawls and into which climbs what seems to be an impresario or spectator? If the ring is the red wedge, site of passion and violence, then the black surround, traversed by the guard ropes, is the apron over which the hapless boxer appears to have been projected into the black chaos of the audience and unconsciousness. Whatever the case may be, this ambivalence enhances the dynamic potential of the scene as the frames slip, bringing differing interpretations to bear and enhancing the sense of movement. The important role of the viewer, both of the poster and of the film it advertises, is foregrounded by the massive face of a man who looks diagonally into the picture along the line of the wedge that partly frames him, with evident concern for the floored boxer in his unconscious state. The illusion of 3-D is cleverly created by the figure of the third man climbing through the ropes into the boxing ring. The contrast between intense light and deep shadow is reproduced both in this latter figure and in the central face, the nose and mouth of which appear in a warm golden glow, while the rest of the face is swathed in red shadow. Many of the structural dispositions visible in this poster echo or anticipate those in Uzelac’s painting, the diamond-shaped trapezoid forming in both compositions an absolutely essential component of the pictorial dynamic, the ambiguity of both reflecting also the dynamic options opened up in Balla’s concept of the futurist picture frame.

In a poster of 1927 advertising the film *The Pounded Cutlet* (originally *The Yokel*, 1926)⁵ the Stenberg brothers express with similar avant-garde economy what is at stake in the boxing encounter. Here the fighters, one in blue, one in red, appear as inverted mirror images of each other, their more or less symmetrical movements reflected in the *décalage* between the main outline of their bodies and the second outline, marked with a red line, a *décalage* that expresses their jerky movement. The strobefike division of the spectating female

and male viewers (bottom right and top left) further enhances the sense of movement within the frame, the central band of each of which, passing like a fulcrum through the body of each boxer and exactly marking thus the axis of rotation around which their punches (in particular their hooks) would be most effectively delivered, provides a further dimension to the dynamics inherent both within the poster design and the boxing match. In this way, the tensions and anxiety inherent to objects moving in their environment is perfectly reproduced in graphic terms.

An Italian magazine cover contemporary with Uzelac's gouache and the Stenberg brothers' posters sums up in the most economical way this chapter's brief exploration of cubist and futurist representations of boxing in graphic terms. For Paulo Garretto's cover image for *La Rivista* (ca. 1930, figure 34) combines the dynamic distortion of the human figure effected by futurists such as Boccioni and Balla with the geometrical energy produced by the triangular motif as perfected by constructivist artists. In this case, the principal triangle emerges from the base of the picture image and operates both as an index to the target of the looming figure in the foreground and as the canvas of the ring, theater of the demolition that seems to be about to be experienced by the exhausted boxer in the background, who clings desperately for support against the ropes in the far corner of the ring. The body of the boxer in the foreground itself forms a dynamic geometrical composition, the back and thighs forming the edge of a regular circle, while head, massive shoulder, lower torso, and thigh mark the angle of a second dynamic triangular form, this time penetrating the image from the right-hand side. It is the interaction of these two planes that provides the dynamic tension of the image, an effect enhanced by the three contrasting tones and the simplified forms that constitute the image. Once again, the graphic or artistic representation of the boxing encounter also provides insight into the latter, as both combatants in the fight situation tend to perceive their opponents in terms either of looming and compact aggressive forms (the clenched glove, the contracted shoulders) or as more open and vulnerable targets in which limbs akimbo and dropped guard invite prompt action.



Figure 28. Unidentified boxers.
Photo by Charles Hoff.



Figure 29. Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, bronze, 1913.
Courtesy of Gianni Mattioli Collection, Milan.

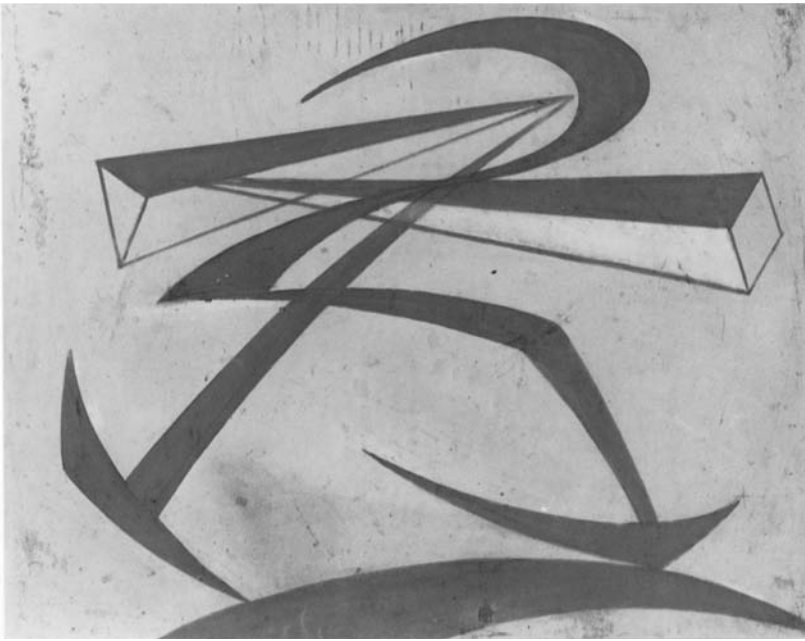


Figure 30. Giacomo Balla, *Boccioni's Fist*, tempera on paper, ca. 1915.
Private collection, Milan.

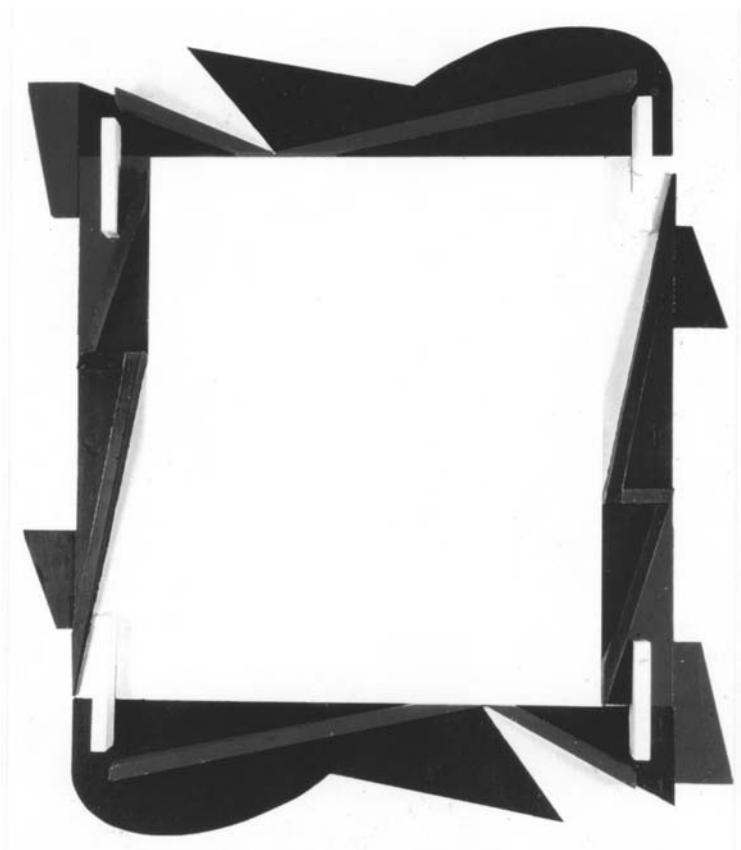


Figure 31. Giacomo Balla, *Futurist Frame*, painted wood, ca. 1927.
Private collection, Rome.



Figure 32. Milivoj Uzelac, *Boxing Match*, ca. 1930.
Courtesy of the author.



Figure 33. Stenberg brothers, "The Punch," 1926.
Batsu Gallery, Ruki Matsumoto Collection, Tokyo.

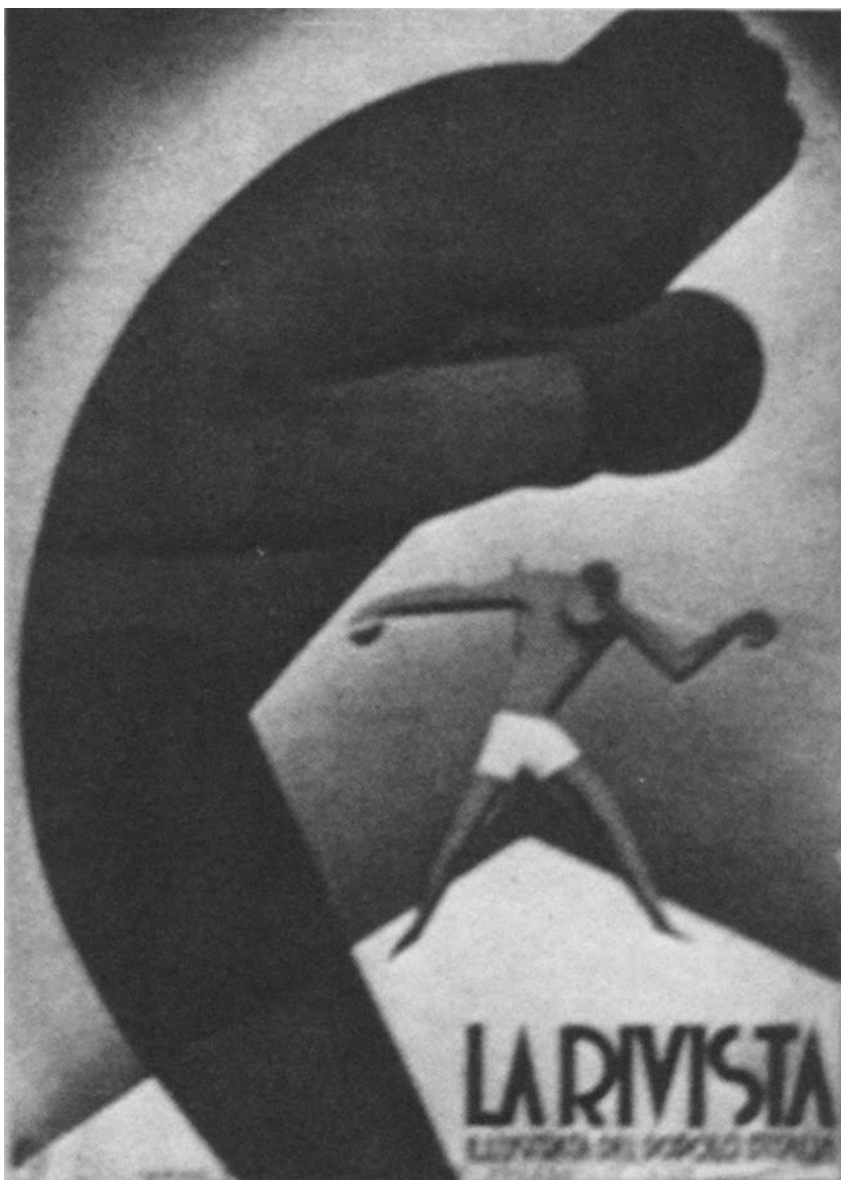


Figure 34. Paolo Garretto, *La Rivista* magazine cover, ca. 1930.

5. Visual Tensions: The Ropes

Sometimes the tautness of the ropes adds to the picture's tension.

John Sheeran

The tensions and anxiety of boxers as they confront each other within the ring, explored by cubist and futurist art in terms of the dynamic interaction of object and environment, is also probed by other artists of the golden age of boxing and after. In the work of artists such as Thomas Eakins (1844–1916), Laura Knight (1877–1970), and Sam Rabin (1903–91), it is often the ropes of the ring that become the primary formal and expressive components of the composition, the bodies of the boxers themselves either being relegated to the sidelines, presented fragmentarily, or, in some later works such as those by Mario Correa, altogether absent. The empty or near-empty boxing ring is thus explored in itself as an expressive and dynamic space in which texture, light, and angle of vision recreate in quasiabstract terms the tensions of the fight situation.

The boxing ring is a cubist space in that it is fully three-dimensional and yet at the same time clearly demarcated. It provides a volume (approximately six cubic meters) sufficiently spacious for two human beings to move around freely and yet not so large that they can escape from each other. The room for maneuver is in fact relatively restricted and the space sufficiently compact for each boxer to be, most of the time, more or less aware of where he stands within the ring. The sense of containment is enhanced by the ropes, whose elasticity can marginally expand or contract the space of movement. The cube is an open one so that unobstructed view of it may be had by the onlookers: the walls of the prison in which the boxers are entrapped are transparent. The spectator's panoptical view is thus in radical contrast to the

confinement and focus of the boxers. Such a space is, even empty, like the blank page for the poet or the empty canvas for the artist, already charged with a latent dynamism, whose infinitely variable parabolas and geometrical moves await activation by the imprint of the boxers' presence.¹

Mario Correa's *Hawktime* (2003; figure 35) explores this potential for movement within the empty space of the ring as it is created by its own internal structure. Set in a neutral, empty room, the dynamic inherent in Correa's ring is a function of the rippling effect of the guard ropes divider strings whose undulating movement implies the vibration activated by contact with the bodies of the absent boxers. The wavy movement of the apron of the ring, as if lifted by a gust of wind, is similarly evocative of action, the whole composition becoming charged with an energy that foretells the boxing event. It is almost as if the ring itself were magically activated, reproducing in the pure terms of its elastic structure the dynamics of the pugilistic encounter. An even more economical presentation of the latter is provided by the Italian graphic artist Luigi Castiglioni (1936–2006), whose poster (figure 36) advertising the Monzon–Tonna middleweight championship of 1975 presents simply the three ropes of the ring, a few drops of the boxers' sweat against the setting sun (or some other cosmic event), which expresses the heat of the encounter. More insight into Castiglioni's technique as a recorder of the symbolism and dynamics at stake in the boxing encounter will be given in chapter 7.

Dame Laura Knight's *Between Rounds* (figure 37) can be read as a kind of figurative re-presentation of the energies implicit in Correa's work. Here the gust of air is produced by the towel waved by a cornerman above the head of the resting boxer while the movement of the ropes is activated by the weary arms of the fighters resting upon them. The curious flattening of the perspective of the space between the two boxers sitting in opposite corners of the ring has the effect of enlarging the sense of space, the overlapping of the ropes in the foreground (darker in color) with those in the background (which appear lighter) further complicating the spatial relations. Not only will these ropes contain and to a certain extent define the action about to commence, they also seem already to be communicating through their vibrations the tense relationship between the two boxers. Once again the angle of vision from a low, upward-looking vantage point stresses the enclosing,

cubelike structure of the ring, suggesting a scene of action already tense with dynamic potentialities.

A contrasting approach to a similar theme is provided by Thomas Eakins in his painting *Between Rounds* (figure 38). Here again the boxer, arms resting against the top ropes of the ring, is being fanned by the cornerman's towel, but in this instance, only one corner of the ring is visible. The frame of the picture slices across the space of the ring, obliterating its right-hand side, the left-hand side of the painting being opened up to anecdotal detail that enlarges the temporal space that the minute interval between rounds affords. The restless onlookers shift in their seats, the timekeeper checks his watch and reaches for the bell, the policemen looks on with phlegmatic attention. In this way Eakins is able to express not only the tensions internal to the boxing action that is about to recommence but also the anticipation or expectation on the part of the viewers.

Between Rounds is one of several masterly presentations of boxers that Eakins painted in 1898 and 1899, *Taking the Count* (figure 39) and *Salutat*, both of 1898, forming with it a kind of triptych. All three paintings are suggestive in their exploration of the various states of tension, relaxation, or readiness to which the male body is susceptible. In these pictures, however, the boxing match does more than merely provide a plausible scenario for putting into practice Eakins's promotion of male figure study as part of artistic training; it also provides a specific context for an evocation of the psychological as well as physical tensions of the encounter. Eakins also did oil studies of other sports, but such works (for example, *Wrestlers*, with its oil sketch of the same year, 1899), though remarkable, do not quite evoke the complexity of the boxing scenes. This may be because the audience is absent and the various barriers—guard ropes of the ring, guard rails of the theater balconies—are not there to add a physical dimension to the tensions expressed. The boxing paintings, like the wrestling ones, are partly based on photographic studies.

But perhaps the most comprehensive take on the internal dynamics of the ring is that offered by the crayon drawings of Sam Rabin, who, uniting the skills of an accomplished boxer with those of a talented artist, was well placed to recreate the tensions of the boxing encounter. Comparing Rabin's boxing drawings to Degas' pastels of ballet dancers, John Sheeran (1985, 17)

stresses the compactness with which they express the bodily movement and physical exertion of the boxers, managing at the same time to create formal patterns and pictorial arrangements that are as satisfying in abstract terms as they are convincing in representational accuracy. As he suggests:

In using geometrical shapes to assist in the composition of his pictures, Rabin maintains a tradition stretching back to the Italian Renaissance. The rope lines, and interlocking planes of the ring, form a vertical, horizontal and diagonal framework into which the figurative element can be built. The abstract shapes created by the ring reinforce and isolate telling figurative passages. (17)

More particularly, Sheeran goes on to show how the outward representation of the boxing ring is also made by Rabin to suggest internal or symbolic dimensions:

For him, the ring represents a stage on which is enacted, almost symbolically through the medium of boxing, man's experience of success and failure. The boxers battle, stagger and crouch. Often they lie crumpled like wounded caged birds, dwarfed by their surroundings. Extreme angles of vision heighten the drama so that the approaching referee takes on the guise of a looming spectre. Anonymous figures lurking behind the safety of the ropes, sit like a jury passing judgement on the condemned fighter. Ropes dance and spring as unseen boxers bounce off them. Sometimes the tautness of the ropes adds to the picture's tension. (17–18)

Another quality of Rabin's boxing pictures is the way they can be seen to work as a series. Taking figures 40–42 for example, we see within the first frame (*Boxer with Yellow Shorts*, figure 40) a young lightweight's somewhat tentative stance as he stands before what is to the picture's viewer an invisible opponent. In the second frame (*Boxing Match IV*, figure 41), the boxer seems to have assessed the situation and is making his attacking move. By frame three (*Knockdown*, figure 42), his opponent appears to have been floored by a blow and is sitting dazed in the bottom corner of an otherwise apparently empty ring.

The contrast between Eakins's *Taking the Count* (figure 38) and Rabin's *Knockdown* (figure 42) of half a century later could hardly be greater: where as the former shows as well as the crouching boxer both his erect opponent

and the referee, the latter has cropped all but the forlorn image of the floored boxer from the scene. The plight and isolation of the latter comes across all the more poignantly, especially as he has been dumped unceremoniously on his pants whereas Eakins's boxer is crouching purposefully before springing up before the end of the count. The close cropping and editing of Rabin's mostly small-scale drawings further enhances their fragmentary quality, the gaps between each frame and the blank areas of the ring opening up spaces that are expressive in both psychological and visual terms.

Another painter of boxing in the golden age of the early twentieth century is George Bellows (1882–1925), whose famous canvases—*Club Night* (1907), *Stag at Sharkey's* (1909), and *Both Members of this Club* (1909) and his large-scale pastel drawing *The Knock-Out* (1907)—caused a sensation when exhibited in New York in the first decade of the century. In her monograph, Marianne Doeze-ma (1992) has effectively contextualized Bellows' paintings in the ambivalent world of early twentieth-century American boxing, a period during which the sport was neither entirely legal nor respectable and yet during which the heavyweight championship (held through much of this period by the black boxer Jack Johnson) became a subject of huge popular interest (1992, 104–13), in particular in that a new “White Hope” was sought to topple the black incumbent (Jess Willard from 1915 and then Jack Dempsey from 1919 would fill this role). Doeze-ma also discusses Bellows' boxing works perceptively against the background of ideas of masculinity or manhood that were very much at issue in America at the time of the end of the Last Frontier and the beginning of women's rights movements (67–104).

However, although Bellows is an interesting painter and his startling representation of boxing matches brought the sport more to the attention of the art public, in fact his paintings offer few original insights—formal or psychological—into boxing or its representation. As he himself admitted, “I don't know anything about boxing; I'm just painting two men trying to kill each other” (Carey and Griffiths 1980, 32). At the same time melodramatic and caricatural, Bellows's pictures occlude beneath their bravura brushstrokes the expression of the psyche of participants or viewers of the match that was more subtly shown by the modernist and avant-garde artists explored in the last chapter. The way Bellows' boxing works handle the guard ropes of the

ring is telling in this respect: either completely elided or partly erased (figure 43), they scarcely contain the violent physical confrontation of the boxers' bodies, offering little of the resistance or tension that can express much of what lies just beneath the surface of the boxing encounter. A later work portraying the dramatic moment in a 1923 fight in which Jack Dempsey (who later won the match) is knocked out of the ring by Luis Angelo Firpo is however more successful in its evocation of the tensions between body and rope.²

A boxing image that manages paradoxically to combine both the tensions characterizing the relation between the boxer and the space of the ring while suppressing part of the latter (in this case the ring's corner post) is that supplied by André Dunoyer de Segonzac (1884–1974) in his etching *Sam MacVea and his Seconds* (1922, figure 44). A contemporary of Bellows, Segonzac (1884–1974) began, like the American artist, exploring the potential of boxing as a visual motif in painting in the first decade of the twentieth century. Associated with the early cubists, with whom he exhibited between 1908 and 1914 (see Distel 1980, 23–74), in such paintings as *Les Boxeurs* of 1911 (later destroyed by the artist), Segonzac, like Bellows, tended to exaggerate or caricature both the violence of the boxing confrontation and the dynamic forms of the fighters, one of the latter taking in an oil of 1911 a strangely elongated or mannerist form. More successful were some of the ink or ink and wash sketches of the early 1920s, such as *The Uppercut that Missed* (ca. 1920–25; reproduced in Distel 1980, 38) or in *Boxeur à genoux la tête au sol*, one of the ink sketches provided as illustration for Tristan Bernard's *Tableaux de boxe* (1922; in the Olympic Museum, Lausanne). In these smaller-scale works, Segonzac is able, through the very tentativeness of his lines, to express more effectively both the febrile energy of the attacking boxer and the limp exhaustion of the floored fighter, in both cases using the large area of blank page to expressive effect. Perhaps Segonzac's most accomplished image, however, like those of Laura Knight and Thomas Eakins, is of the seated boxer being fanned between rounds by his seconds (figure 37). Here, the dramatic arabesques made by the three cornermen's white towels contrast with the angled tension of the corner ropes that support the fatigued head and gloved fists of the seated boxer. The erasure of the corner post permits not only a more telling glimpse of the concerted heads of the cornermen who lean over the boxer to swab

his cuts and whisper advice for the coming round, but also a more expressive take on the tensions of the moment: the taut angles of the corner ropes, defining the rectangular space of the ring, contrast with the violent flurry of movement, depicted not only in the form of the swirling towels, but also that imagined immediately to follow as the boxers reenter combat with each other. The long and powerful arms of the seated boxer are particularly awe-inspiring in this respect, seeming like the arms of a propeller that on reactivation will deliver a cubist cocktail of flailing circular movements within the square of the ring.

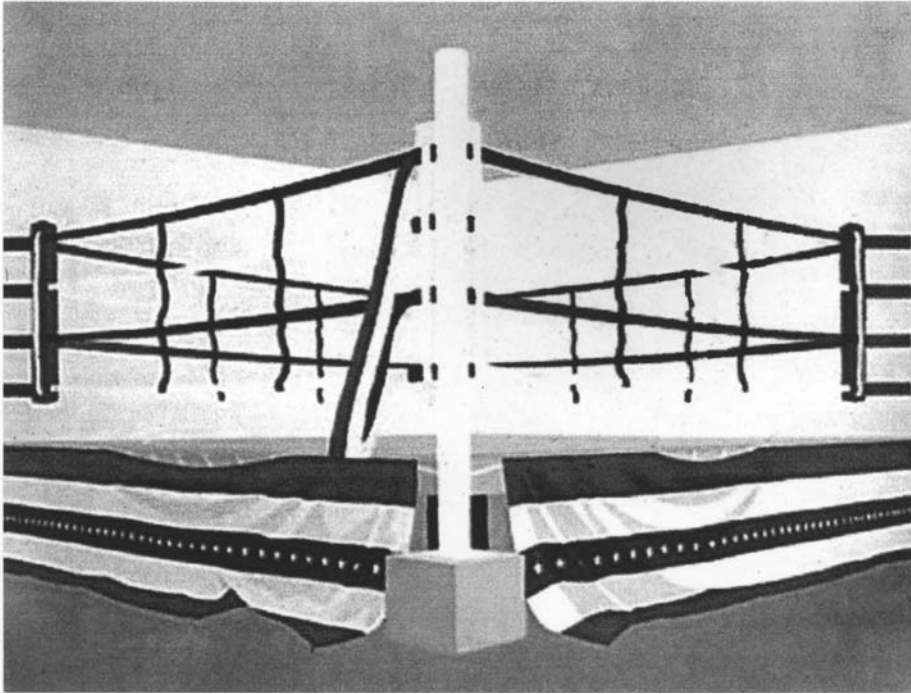


Figure 35. Mario Correa, *Hawktime*, acrylic on canvas, 2003.
Reproduced by permission of Mario Correa.

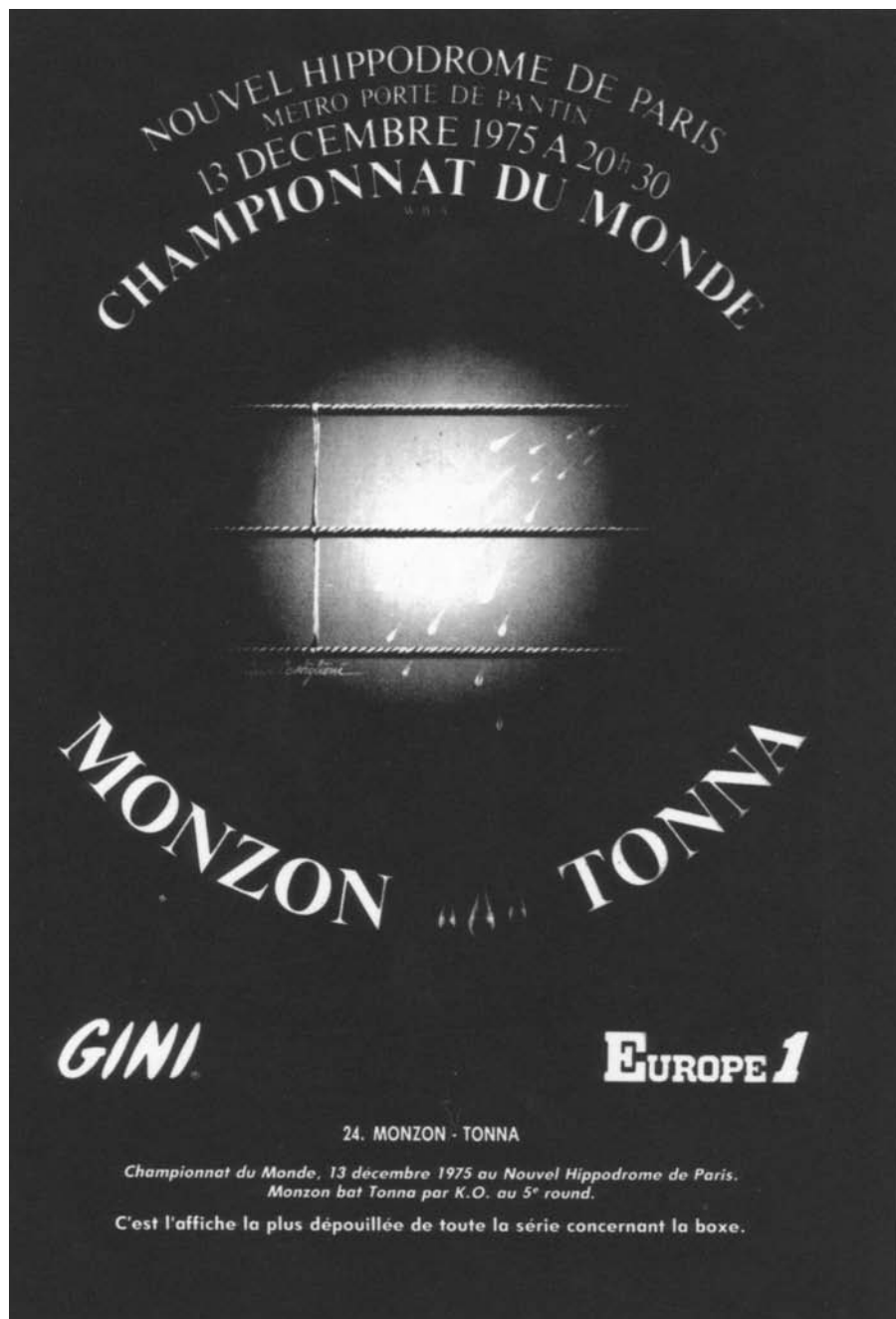


Figure 36. Luigi Castiglioni, Monzon-Tonna poster, 1975.
Courtesy of the estate of Luigi Castiglioni.

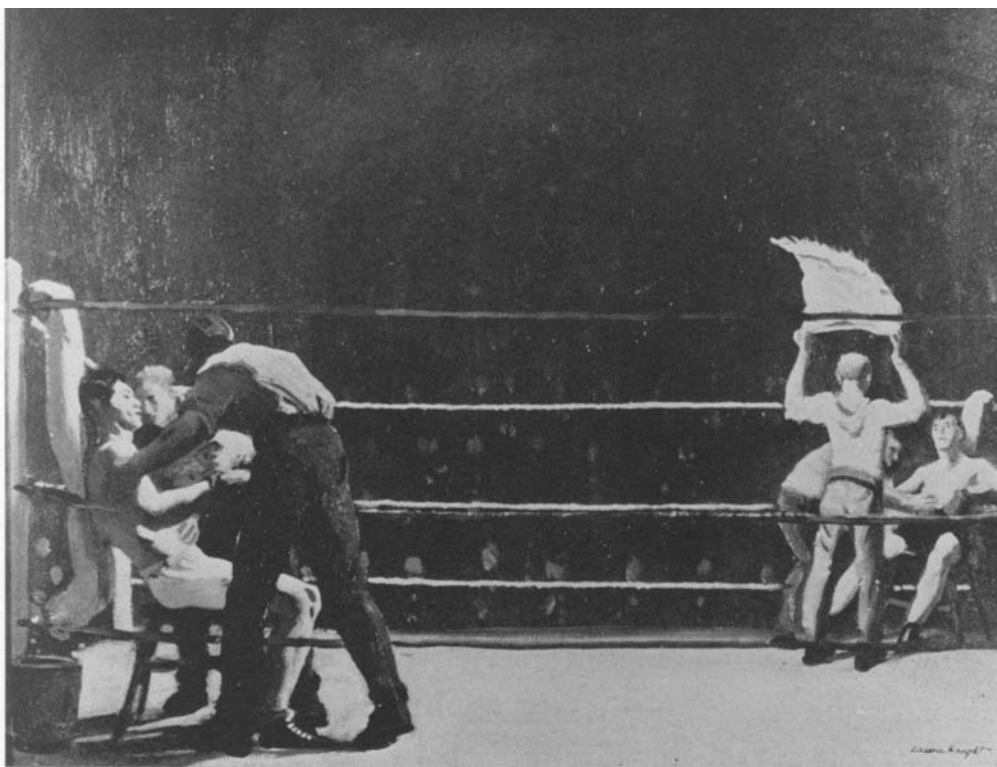


Figure 37. Dame Laura Knight, *Between Rounds*, oil on canvas, ca. 1920.
Private collection.

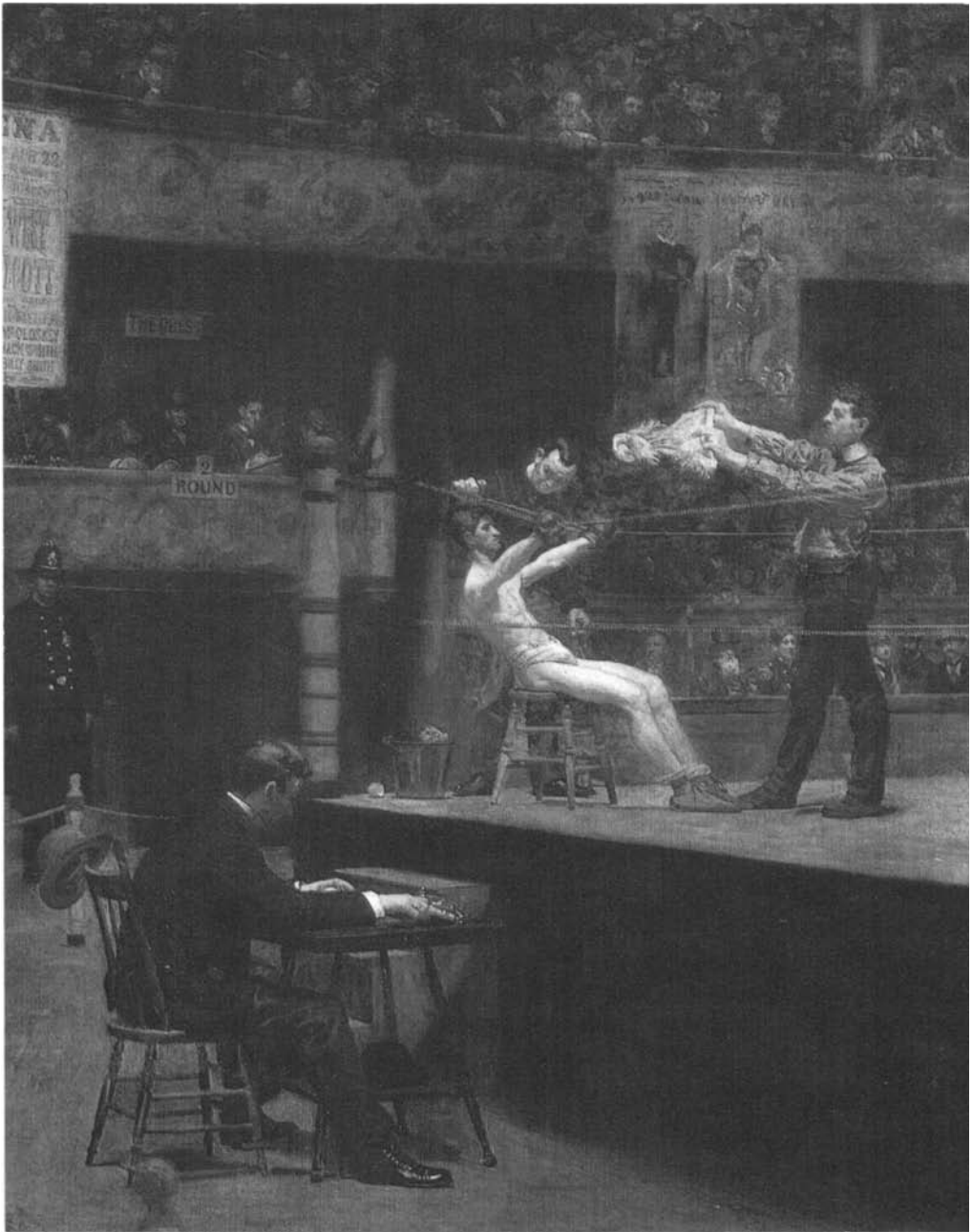


Figure 38. Thomas Eakins, *Between Rounds*, oil on canvas, 1899.
Reproduced by permission of University of Pennsylvania Museum.

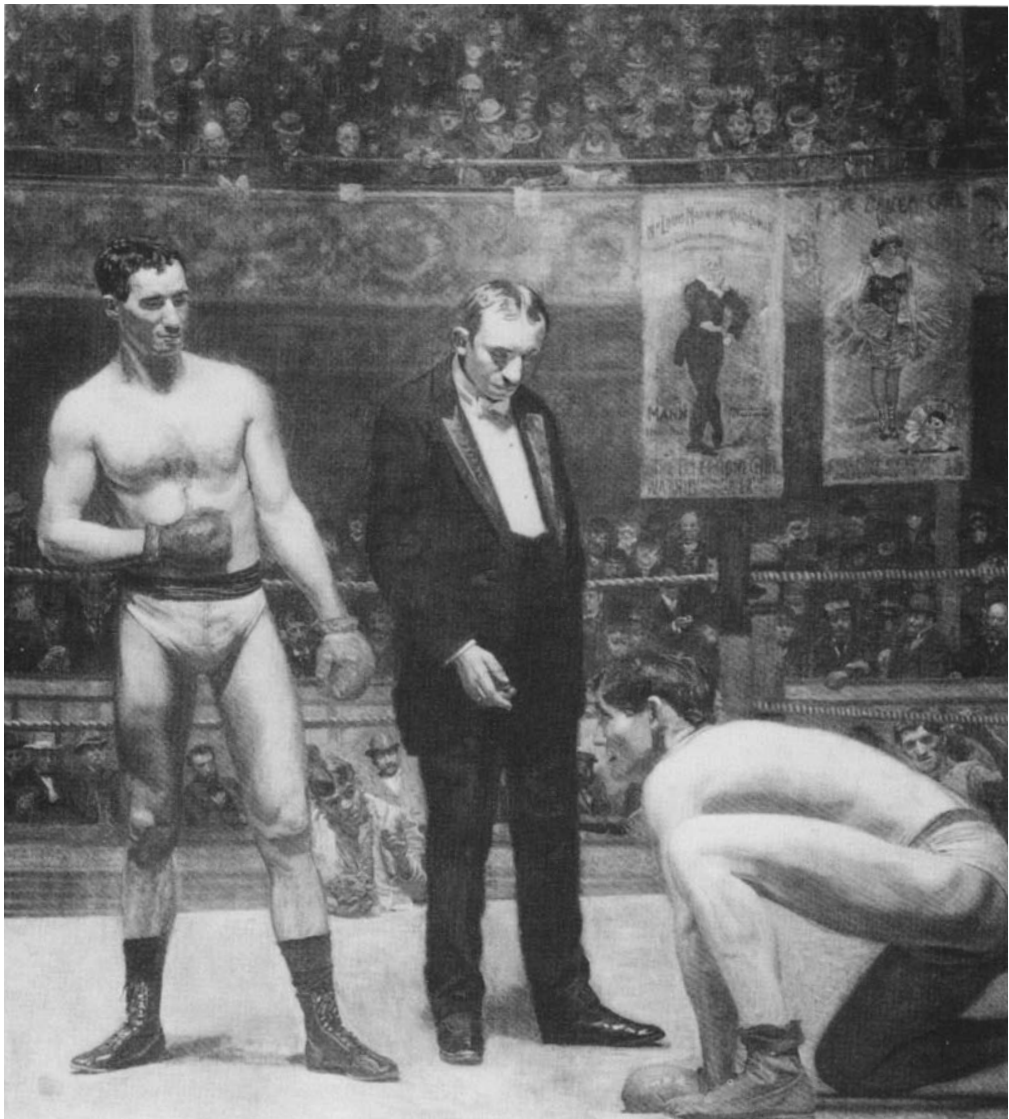


Figure 39. Thomas Eakins, *Taking the Count*, oil on canvas, 1898.
Yale University Art Gallery.



Figure 40. Sam Rabin, *Boxer with Yellow Shorts*, pastel.
Private collection.

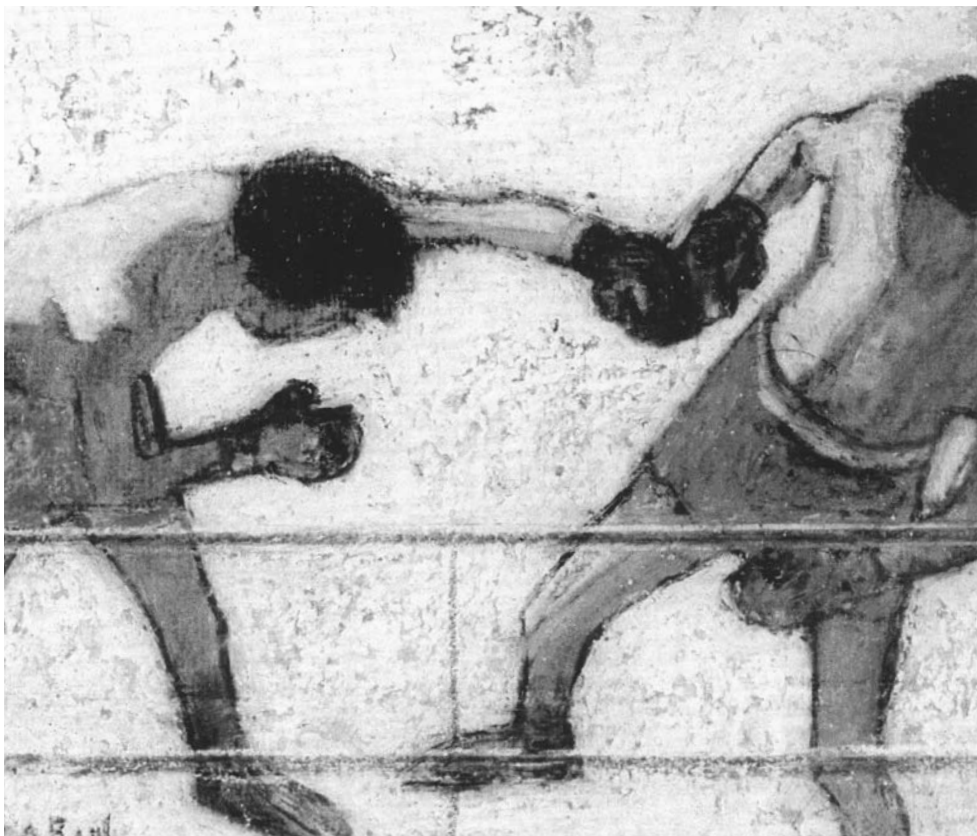


Figure 41. Sam Rabin, *Boxing Match IV*, pastel.
Private collection.

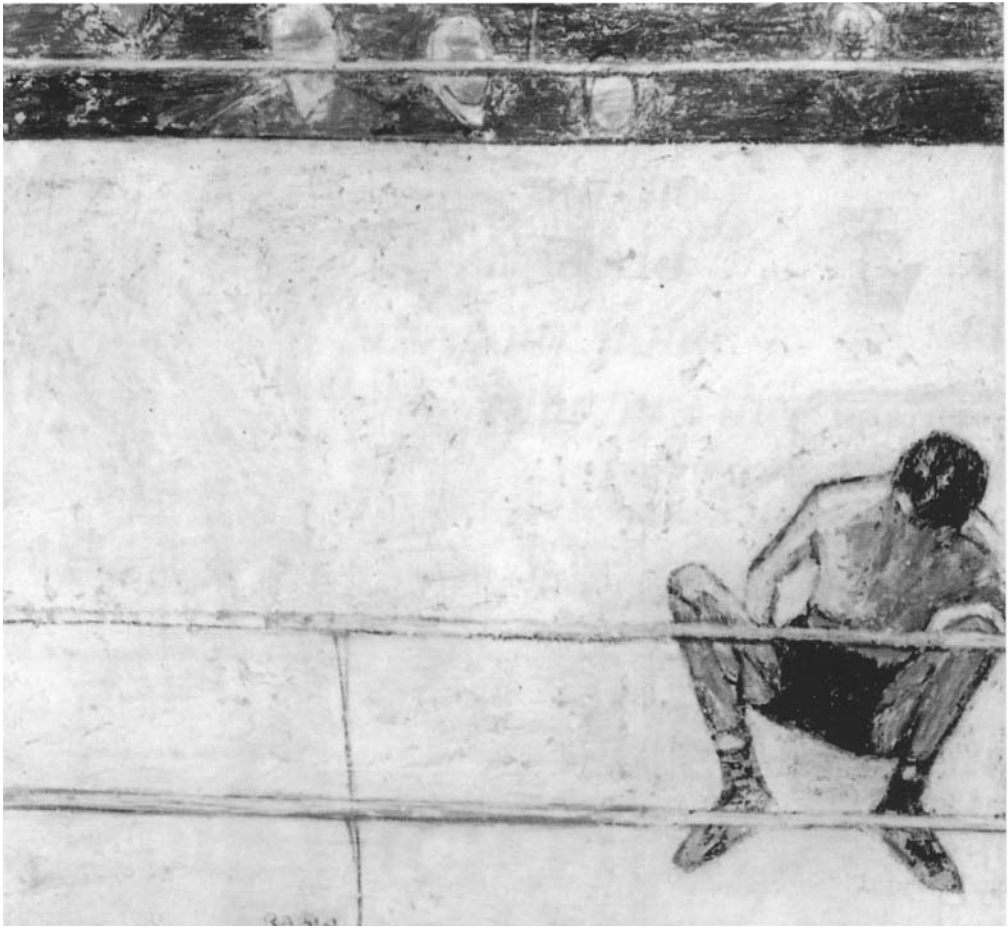


Figure 42. Sam Rabin, *Knockdown*, pastel.
Private collection.

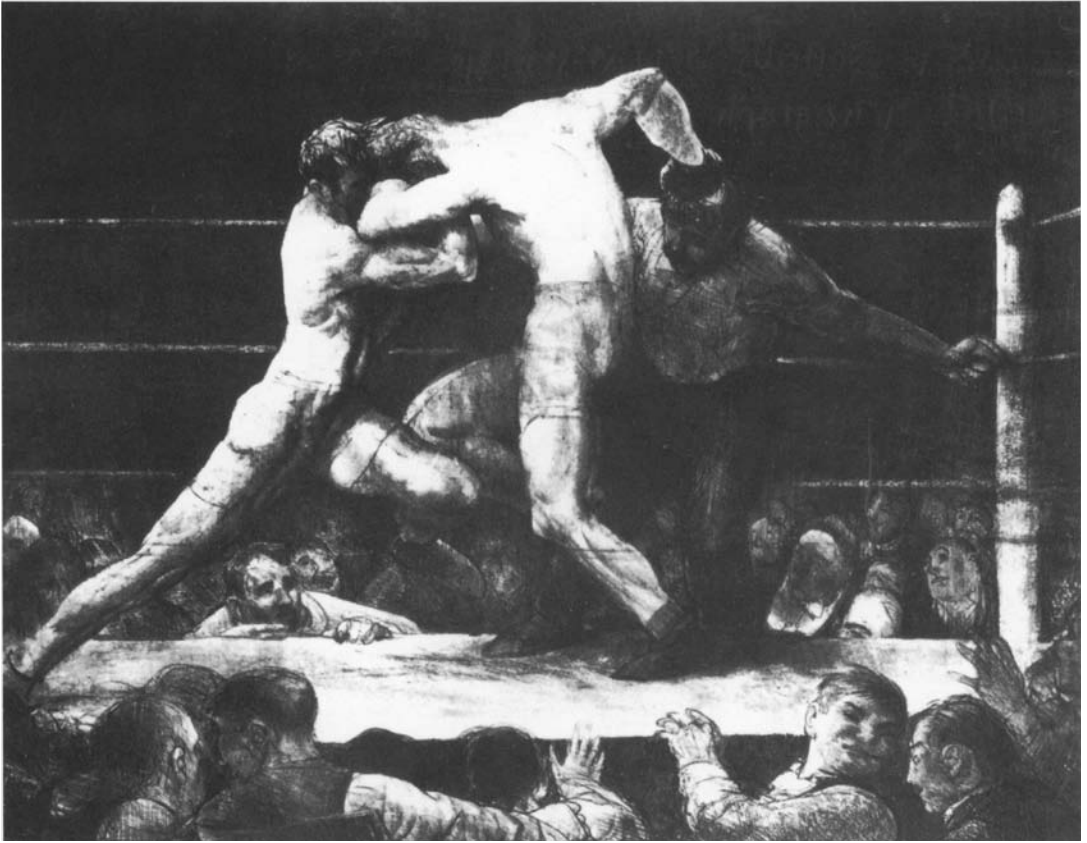


Figure 43. George Bellows, *Stag at Sharkey's*, lithograph, 1917.
Private collection.

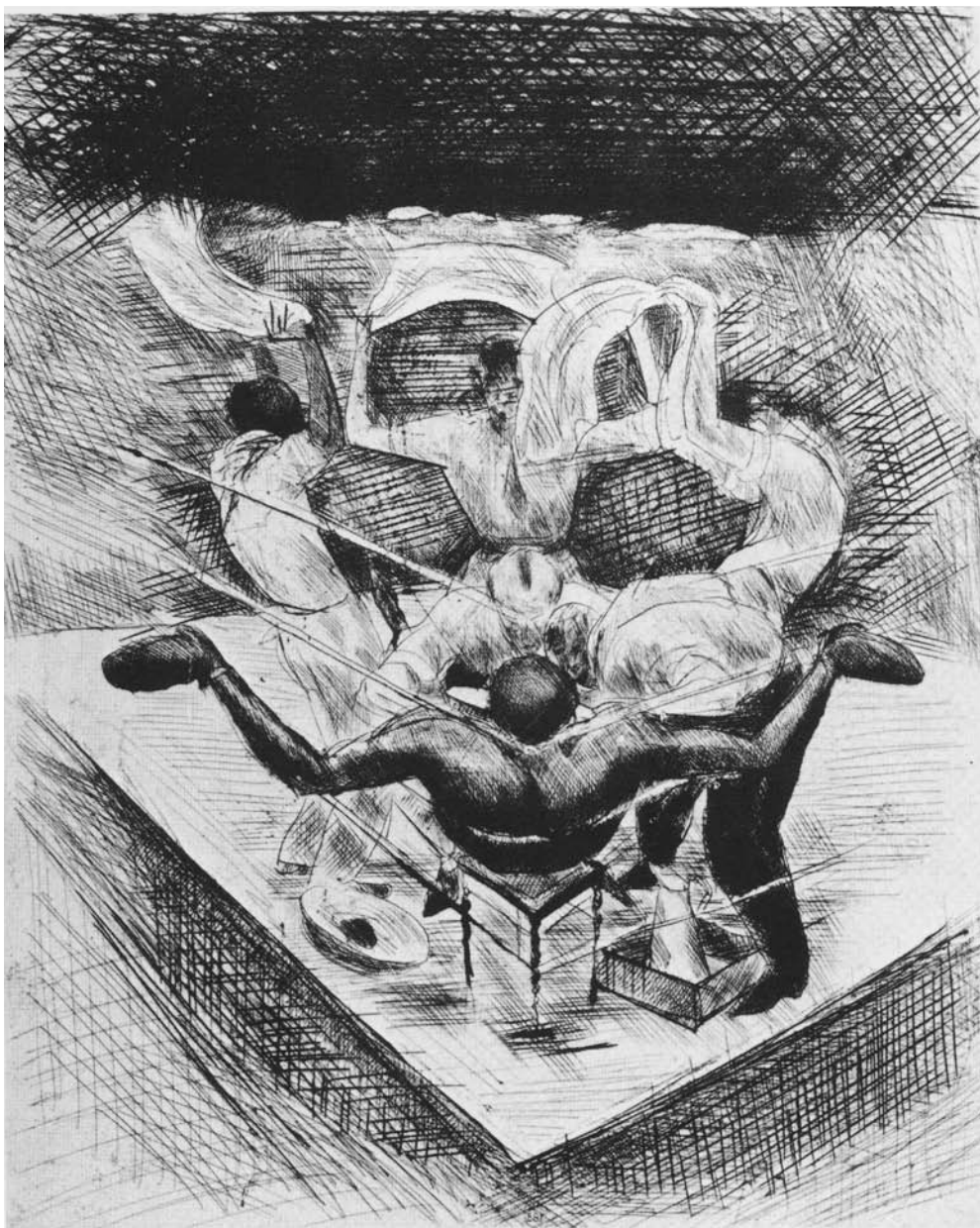


Figure 44. André Dunoyer de Segonzac, *Sam MacVea and his Seconds*, etching, 1922.
Reproduced by permission of Bibliothèque nationale de France.

6. Mythical Confrontations: The Ring as Canvas and as Text

The agony/is on/the leather/is on.

James Coleman

To fight, to kill, to die.

Philippe Perrin

Whereas cubist, futurist, and constructivist artists were primarily concerned with exploring the object and its (albeit internal) dynamism from the outside, clarifying in the process the way it is perceived or experienced by the viewer, the artists examined in this chapter focus as much on the inner, psychological dimension of the boxing experience. This poses a particular challenge for a number of reasons. First, because in boxing things happen so fast; it already takes a lot of concentration on the part of the viewer simply to follow the rapid succession of movements compressed into the three minutes of a round. It has been calculated, for example, that British bantamweight boxer Naseem Hamed could throw thirty-eight combination punches in eight seconds with eight different foot and ten different hand movements, or up to fifty-four combination punches in twelve seconds (see Beattie 1996, 196). Second, the intense visual excitement of boxing tends fully to absorb the viewer's attention, drastically reducing his or her time to reflect on the competing boxers' mental processes. And third, from the point of view of the boxer, since boxing is a sport in which reflection and action are of necessity so closely and intensely coordinated, it is extremely difficult to separate visceral experience (energy, pain, shock) from psychological reaction. In the light of this, the procedure adopted by the artists examined here — Philippe Perrin

(b. 1964), Miguel Rio Branco (b. 1946), and James Coleman (b. 1941)—will essentially be that of exploring the various means of slowing down and projecting key moments of the action and the various peripheral or preparatory rituals associated with the boxing match. In doing so they are able to give valuable insight into the “psyching up” process as well as the psychological experience of the boxing encounter in both its real and its mythical dimensions.

The Grenoble-based French installation artist Philippe Perrin explored between 1983 and 1990 what was to him at stake in the champion boxer by elaborating an imaginary or mythical identity. Naturally, he first started to construct this persona from the outside, using, like any actor, the props and costumes that would help shape the role. He produced posters advertising his imaginary fights, reconstructed a training gym, and released booklets listing various boxing accessories such as gum-shields and gloves. He then, in an installation of 1990, *My Last Fight*, produced a series of life-size head-and-shoulders black-and-white portrait photographs (figure 45) in which the boxer persona is shown in the ritual and delicate act of binding his hands before leaving the dressing room to enter the ring. A sense of the apprehension and anxiety of the prefight situation can be read on the boxer’s face depicted in these photos, the fragments of text on a wall panel “To fight, to kill, to die,” articulating the ultimate odds against which the forthcoming fight will be fought. At the same time, the overhead lighting of the photographic process adds a glamorous, publicity-shot patina.

Most significant of all in *My Last Fight*, however, is the way the theater of the boxing encounter—the ring—is transformed by the artist into an expression of what is at stake in both aesthetic and psychological terms (figure 46). So the canvas that traditionally covers the surface of the boxing ring becomes the support of a giant self-portrait of the artist. It is painted in black and white, not only because it is adapted from one of the hand-bandaging photo images mentioned above but also because this restricted palette perhaps expresses a certain objectivity on the part of the artist—the painting is ostensibly the work of an official Soviet political painter executed in the socialist realist style. The frame provided by the boxing ring, scene in the fight itself of an unarticulated psychological though physically fully apparent drama, is thus finally put to specifically artistic use as it frames the artist’s

portrait. The very size of the latter emphasizes the vulnerability of both boxer and artist as they literally and metaphorically lay themselves open to the scrutiny of the viewer. The ropes enclosing the ring express not only, as I have already suggested in chapter 3, the tensions implicit in the boxing encounter but also the imprisoning of the portrait in its frame, the trapping of the combatant in his encounter with his opponent, and the obligation of boxer and artist to perform within bounds that ensure the maximum visibility and scrutiny of their actions by the viewer. In this way the metaphor of the boxing ring as site of heroic self-confrontation in a very public sphere, a potentiality, as we have seen, hinted at implicitly in some earlier artistic representations of it, is here made explicit.

Perrin uses the full panoply of current artistic techniques to realize his boxing project—photography, paint, canvas, graphics, and installation, as well as real objects. James Coleman and Miguel Rio Branco, in some of their works, use cinema and voice-over to add further dimensions of complexity to their installations. In the two works examined here, however, Rio Branco uses photography, his main medium of expression in the last decade. His use of a slow shutter speed in *Blue and Red* (1993; figure 47) of course implies movement: the blurring of the exercising boxers' bodies expresses both the external (speed) aspect and also the internal (half-conscious absorption) aspect of their experience. This latter constitutes a vital but little-discussed aspect of boxing: the aim of training is to so exercise and prepare the body for split-second movement and automatic reaction that the mind itself scarcely keeps pace with the movement of events, the body's reflexes and the brain's instincts being trained to operate virtually independent of conscious decision. Boxing is the art of the perfect movement, the lightning blow, the instantaneous evasion, skills and reflexes that pose a formidable challenge also to boxing art as it tries in its turn to re-present them in graphic terms. The challenge implies achieving success both in expressing certain boxing or training actions as really experienced by practitioner and in reproducing this experience in such a way that it can be shared, in an analogous form, by the viewer.

A clue as to how Rio Branco tackles the experience of the practitioner is given by the title of his photo of three boxers doing sit-ups in the ring, namely *Blue and Red* (figure 47). What the boxers in this situation no doubt experience is a

rush of sensations—color, texture, smell, movement—inextricably mixed in a kind of visceral or physiological matrix that partly numbs the conscious mind both to the pain and to the specific, analyzable detail of their actions. They do not consciously look at their own bodies but focus rather on their bodies' movement. So it is not figurative representation but simple sensations—red, blue; hot, cold; painful, calming—that constitute the essence of the experience and the artist correspondingly invites the viewer to interpret them in similar terms. The red and blue also define for both boxers and viewer the two-dimensional planes that make up the cube or 3-D theater of the boxers' action. The ropes of the ring are bound in blood-red tape, some of which is already coming adrift from the rope and bleeding down toward the canvas. The canvas is blue, a calm sea or sky, the horizon of the boxers action whether, as here, training, or at the next stage in their sparring or fighting encounters. The unraveling of the ropes' tape may express in visual terms the strain on and depredation of the boxers' muscles and sinews as they complete their exhausting circuits and prepare themselves for the even greater stresses of the fight situation. The unraveling tape is also of course a function precisely of the tussles against the ropes that constitute an essential part of the boxing action and signals the difficulty the ropes often have in containing the potentially anarchic movement of the struggling bodies. The fragments of red material also foretell the blood that is likely to be spilt in boxing encounters. In this way the viewer is given a heightened awareness of what is at stake in the boxing and training experience.

In the second photo work, *Saint Sebastian* (figure 48), Rio Branco aims to give insight into what is at stake in the inner, mental life of the boxer by presenting him as a martyr figure whose physical sufferings have a spiritual motivation. Saint Sebastian was a Roman officer of the time of Diocletian in the third century AD, born in Narbonne, France, and put to death in Rome. Secretly a Christian, he was ordered to be shot with arrows and left for dead. Miraculously, none of the arrows pierced any vital organs and he was nursed back to health. When he confronted the Roman emperor with a fresh avowal of faith, he was beaten to death with clubs and dumped into the Cloaca Maxima, the main Roman sewer. As a Christian icon (and as a theme for the portrayal of the male nude) he became popular in Italian painting from the fourteenth century. In reinterpreting Saint Sebastian as a boxer, Rio Branco had

merely to change the context of his martyrdom from an execution ground to the boxing ring. Bare-chested and perspiring, head raised heavenward, this Sebastian awaits not the piercing arrows, but the heavy blows of his second chastisement, the Roman clubs being reinterpreted in terms of his opponents' fists, the bundle of boxing gloves hanging just behind his head metonymically expressing the flurry of punches he is about to suffer. The insight into the internal turmoil of the boxer is given in particular through the figure's beseeching, upturned eyes, by the flawless but vulnerable torso, and by the half-open mouth in which the gum-shield provides an original artistic expression of both the torment and the ecstasy of the boxer. The effect of chiaroscuro, light and dark, reproduces the painterly technique of an artist such as Caravaggio, expressing the emotional and physical as well as the more visual reverberations of the situation.

But what precisely are these latter? The boxer is after all not a Christian saint. To whom or to what is his martyrdom dedicated? To a heroic vision of himself? To a certain image of masculinity? To an experience of the mind-body relationship in which pleasure and pain, resistance and release exist in symbiotic contiguity? To living momentarily (the extent of a match or a round or two of sparring) on an edge in which excitement and danger create a sense of the primeval vitality of life unmatched perhaps by any other experience? No doubt there is an element of all these factors at play in this image, which not being solely allegorical, does not invite a specific interpretation. That Saint Sebastian survived his first death sentence to live, as it were, to fight another day, is a feature shared of course by many boxers for whom a defeat is often only the prelude to a further, hopefully more successful, combat. In the same way, Rio Branco's image may also be subjected to repeated and not necessarily identical interpretations.

Another and no doubt better-known incarnation of the boxer as Saint Sebastian is that of "The Passion of Muhammad Ali" as presented on the cover of *Esquire* magazine in April 1968 (figure 49). The context of this remarkable image, as all boxing fans know, is the travails of the former Cassius Clay who, on refusing to accept his conscription into the U.S. Army to fight in Vietnam, was threatened with imprisonment and disqualified from his claim to the world heavyweight boxing championship. But of course, in hindsight, and probably even at the time, depending on the viewer's response, the image

works more generally as an archetype of the boxer as saint, shouldering the pain and anxiety of the male condition and representing his “passion” as an icon to others of his sex. There is little doubt that the image, in the light of the arrows piercing the immaculate flesh of this perfect specimen of manhood, is also one of homoerotic desire.

Perhaps the most complete recent synthesis of takes on the boxing experience, in both internal/psychological and external/visual terms, is that contrived by the Irish artist James Coleman (b. 1941) in his 1977 installation *Box (ahharetturnabout)*. This piece consists of an endlessly repeated film loop of short fragments of the original footage recording of the famous Jack Dempsey–Gene Tunney heavyweight championship bout of 1927 accompanied by a voice-over in which the obsessive thoughts of Tunney are breathlessly articulated (for part of the voice-over text see figure 50). From the observer’s point of view, the continual playback of a few instants of the fight (and not necessarily the most memorable—this was the match of the famous “long count” of the seventh round which in effect saved the game for Tunney) gives the viewer an exceptional opportunity to savor, despite the flickering movement of the screen, specific moments of the combat. The circling of the boxers expresses their entrapment not only in the match, not only in the ring, but also in the narcissistic mirror-image of two Irish Americans battling to defeat both each other and perhaps something in themselves. Tunney needs Dempsey to prove himself (his existence, his authenticity as a man, as a complete being, his hero status as world-champion boxer) but risks certain pain and possible death in the process. The same holds for Dempsey. Perhaps the whole proceeding is more agonizing for Tunney (which may be why the piece seems to be seen from his point of view) since although the reigning champion, this status had to be won hard in a previous bout with Dempsey, who hitherto had dominated American heavyweight boxing. What is further at stake for Tunney is that, perhaps less of a natural boxer than Dempsey, he had to negotiate a steeper learning curve to arrive at his preeminence, drawing on theoretical reflection as well as practice in the ring. The bookish aspect of the Shakespeare-reading Tunney is perhaps reflected in the instructions he issues himself (as suggested by the voice-over) and more particularly in the way that in some catalogs accompanying showings of this piece, the voice-over text is superimposed on an illustration from a period boxing manual.

As any enthusiastic amateur, let alone hardened professional, knows, poring over such manuals (whether they be written by Tunney or Dempsey in their later years) is a fascinating exercise, but in the heat of the action in the ring the lessons to be learned from them seem all too easily to fly out of the window. Mistakes are made, one of which — most likely forgetting to duck (as the boxing manual image reminds us) — will cost one fighter the match. The continuous repetition of the film loop enables each punch in theory to be endlessly reanalyzed, but none can be taken back and the inexorability of an outcome is a fact simultaneously dreaded and hoped for by each combatant.¹

In many ways the manuscript of the voice-over to this piece is a complete work in itself. Like a text by Samuel Beckett (James Coleman's deep interest in theater is in evidence in this piece, as in many works of the 1980s and 1990s), it manages to convey, through its use of pauses and silences, semi-articulate sighs as well as a sophisticated repertory of articulatory strategies, a sense of the confused but motivated mental processes of the boxer under stress. Combining conscious observations and self-instructions with quasimythical associations or imprecations surfacing from a less conscious level, it provides a kind of mental choreography of the boxing event. Simultaneously strategic and emotional, images of beer, wood, leather; limbs, blows, moves, operate as metonyms of the boxer's body and mind, somehow combining to connect the action to a larger picture in which the embattled Tunney can perhaps find the mythical strength he requires to sustain him in his awesome task. The effort will of course only ever be partially successful: the unity of self, of body and mind, of energy and determination, can only be sustained under the pressure of combat. After the match, after the adrenaline high has abated, the body will fall back into its old mental-physical duality, and the boxer will soon be yearning again for a new challenge, for a fresh opportunity to experience that ecstasy of pain and danger that for some, it seems, only boxing can provide.

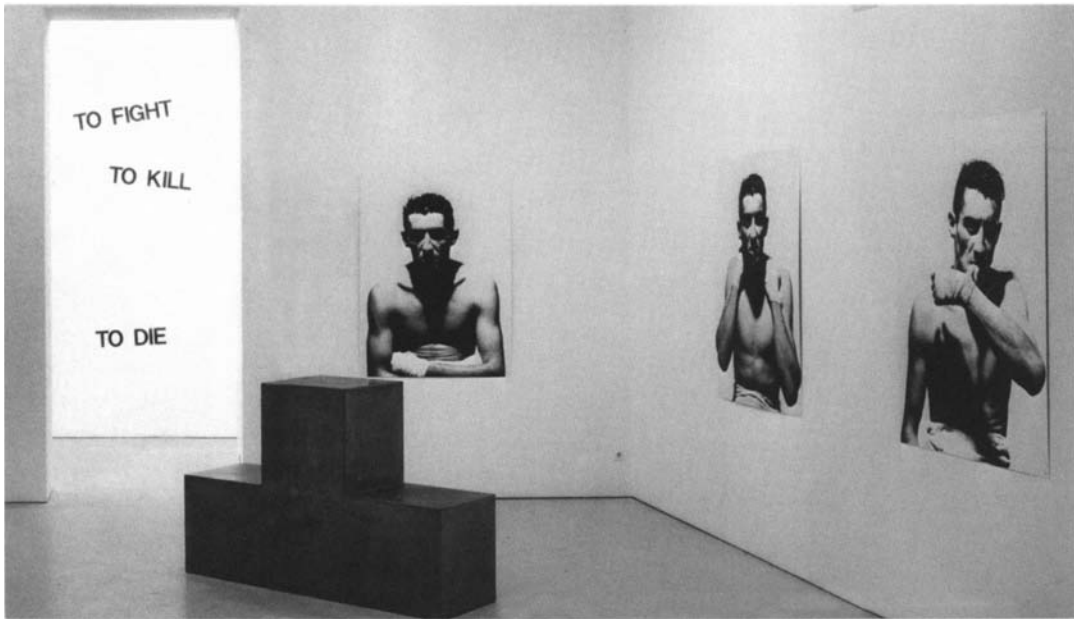


Figure 45. Philippe Perrin (official Soviet political painter), *My Last Fight*, 1990.
Reproduced by permission of Philippe Perrin.

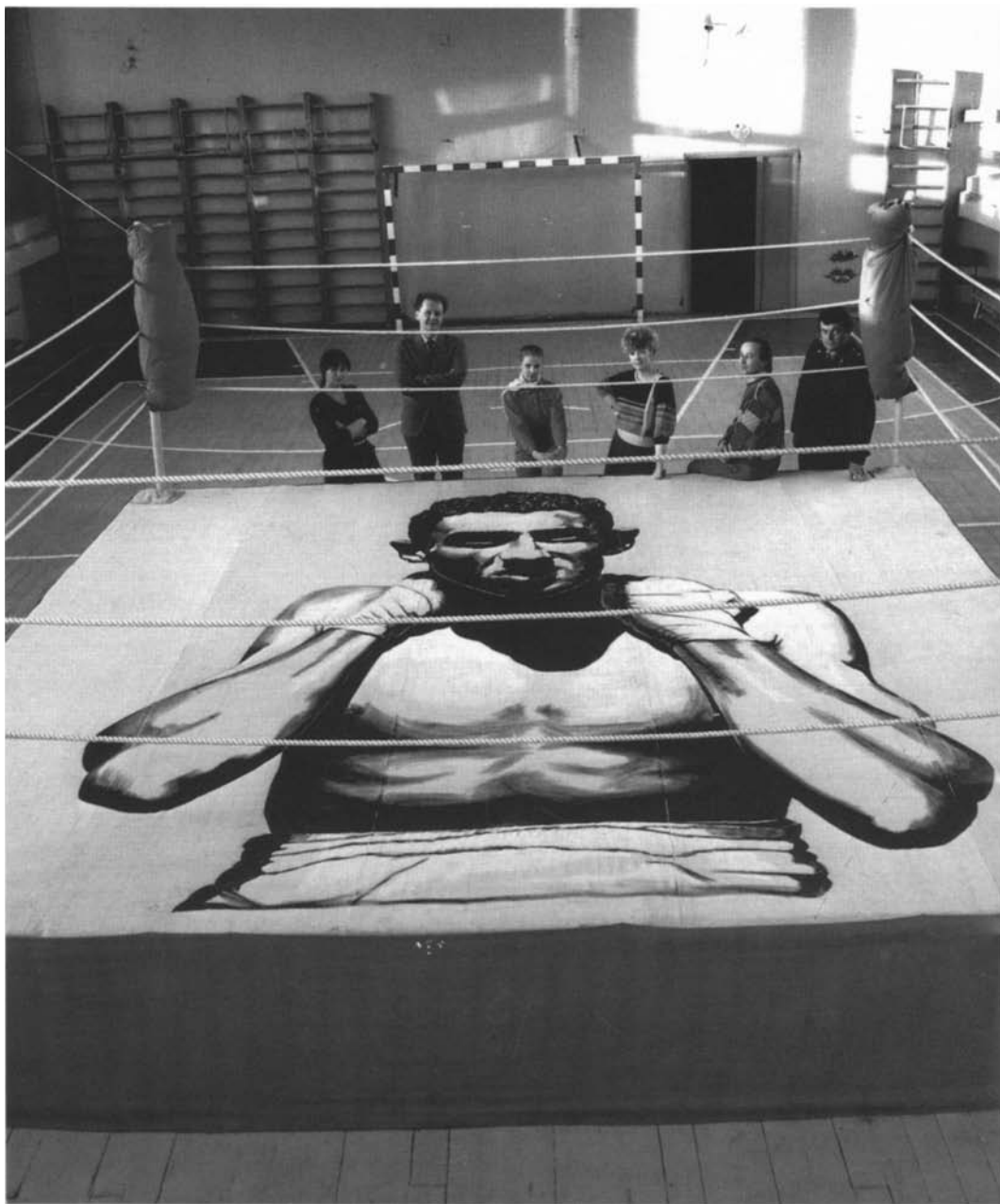


Figure 46. Philippe Perrin, *My Last Fight*, 1990.
Reproduced by permission of Philippe Perrin.



Figure 47. Miguel Rio Branco, *Blue and Red* ("Santa Rosa" series), 1993.
Reproduced by permission of Miguel Rio Branco.

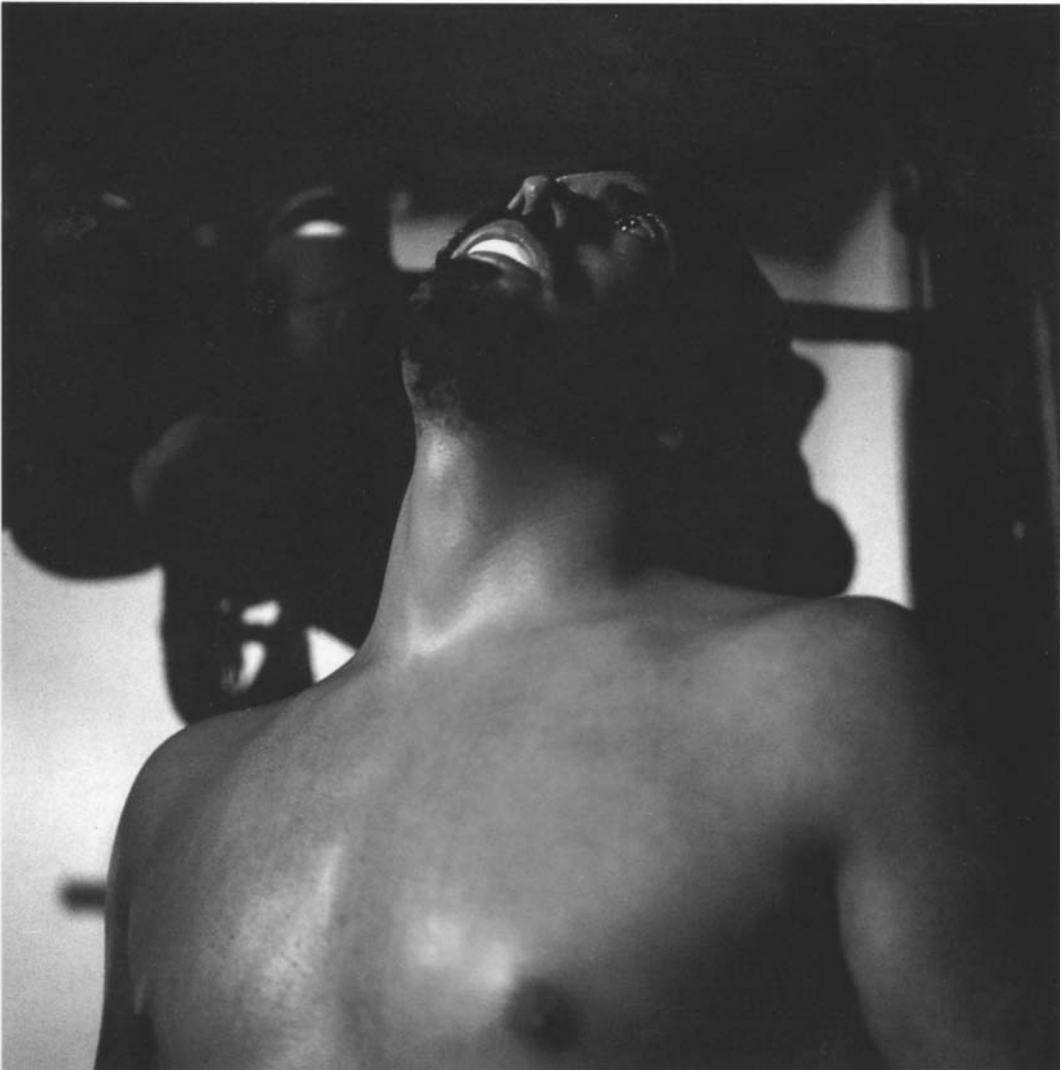


Figure 48. Miguel Rio Branco, *Saint Sebastian* (Santa Rosa series), 1993.
Reproduced by permission of Miguel Rio Branco.



Figure 49. Muhammad Ali as Saint Sebastian, 1968.
Originally printed on the cover of *Esquire* magazine.



Figure 50. James Coleman, Box (ahharetturnabout), 1977.
Extract of voice-over script. Photo courtesy of James Coleman.

7. Visual Metonymies: The Fist and the Glove

The fist is an everyday weapon, the human weapon par excellence, the only one organically adapted to the sensibility, resistance, offensive and defensive structures of the human body.

Maurice Maeterlinck

Oh the charm of an enormous fist, punching the air.

Paul Eluard

Among the essential functions of poetic language are metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor proposes an object or a quality in terms of another object or quality, bringing together two fields of association, both of which are further enriched by the mutual association of the two elements constituting the metaphor. In a visual sphere such as that of the poster, these fields of association are often established by the superimposition of elements whose amalgamation produces what is in effect a *visual* metaphor created by juxtaposing two formally analogous but semantically disparate objects. Metonymy is a rhetorical feature in which effect is expressed by cause, content by container, the whole by the part. This latter characteristic tendency—the expression of a whole by a part—lends metonymy particularly well, in the visual field, to indexical signs, road or other warning notices. That is, signs where economy of expression is a function of the often restricted overall dimensions of the sign and of the necessity of maintaining clarity and economy of visual message.

One of the best-known visual metonymies is that of the pointing finger or hand. The pointing finger is, of course, called the “index” and thus confirms the commonly perceived indexical functions of finger or hand. The poster was

also quick to use the hand motif as an effective metonymy. In road signs, the raised hand means STOP, and the poster's function becomes literally to stop the passerby, thus drawing attention to itself. This basic function is illustrated in Jean Carlu's famous New York subway poster "Stop 'em to sell 'em" (1947), which clearly underlines the poster's function as an image arresting enough to stop passersby in their tracks.

The metonymic deconstruction of the human body has become, at least since the time of Petrarch (1304–74), a convention of lyrical poetry. The eyes, mouth, hair, or hands of the object of desire were focused on in such a way that they became fetishes fuelling the fantasies of the poet or writer. By targeting a specific part of the body, the poet was able to draw out the profound or mysterious associations conjured up by the loved object. A similar metonymization of the human body became common practice in the poster, especially since the 1920s and 1930s. For, like love poetry, the poster tends to focus on those parts of the body most adept at communicating, that is, eyes, mouth, and hands. So, in Fritz Bühler's poster advertising Roger et Gallet lipstick (1948), all we see is an elegantly gloved hand and a luscious pair of lips in which the lipstick itself becomes a kind of expressive extension of the index, linking hand to mouth, throwing the latter into relief. In a theatrical poster announcing *The Jazz Singer* (1927), in which Al Jolson starred, the artist has indicated only the singer's white-gloved hands, eyes and mouth exaggeratedly painted in red, all against a black background. In this way, he manages to create in the poster image exactly the black and white effect of the black and white minstrel choreography, itself a rare example of reality being perceived metonymically rather than integrally.

Sporting images are particularly rich in their use of metonymy. This is especially true of boxing posters since boxing is a sport in which a specific part of the body—the fist or boxing glove—is of primary importance. In presenting this sport in visual terms as a poster, the potential for metonymization is thus exceptional. And we shall see that in the skillful hands of Luigi Castiglioni (1936–2003), the image of the boxing glove or fist, in its own right a cliché of visual representation, becomes a source of quite unexpected visual reverie, while in those of Claude Kuhn, the visual ambiguity of boxing images is further complicated and enriched by witty wordplay.¹

As we saw in chapter 4, the Stenberg brothers' boxing images (figure 33)

use constructivist and photomontage techniques to analyze and activate the image, introducing movement and visual excitement to relay the message of the boxing films they advertise. Using bold, saturated color and simple, dynamic shapes, their posters keep textual accompaniment to the minimum, contriving to reproduce in purely visual terms not only the intensity of the boxing match but also the enraptured stare of the poster viewer as his or her gaze is directed and focused by the shapes within the poster frame.

In Luigi Castiglioni's boxing posters of the 1970s and 80s, the metonymical element—the fist or the boxing glove—represents not only the presence of the boxer or boxers participating in the match the poster announces but also the nucleus of an often complex metaphorical development. Castiglioni usually presents the boxer's gloved hand from the inside, that is, the side on which the glove's laces are clearly visible (most of his posters date from before the advent of Velcro). This is to stress the fact that the glove is a prosthesis, an artificial addition, a kind of metaphorical extension of the boxer's naked fist. The clenched or raised fist—already, as we have seen, clichéd metonymies—conventionally symbolize masculine aggression, being emblems of vengeance or revenge. What is interesting in Castiglioni's posters is the way in which he suggests, while retaining this necessary aggressive dimension, the metaphorical aspects of the image that can take on surprisingly tender reverberations.

Castiglioni's Tonna–Finnegan “fist-flag” poster of 1980 portrays the idea of a European championship by bringing together the national flags of France and Britain in a correctly laced glove against a background of cataclysmic explosion. He thus expresses the idea both of real aggression and of proper sportsmanship that, in theory, regulates all boxing encounters, especially between contestants of different countries. A gloved fist is presented in a similar way in a poster advertising the Duran–Tavarez and Backus–Zami matches (1974, figure 51). Here the boxing glove transforms itself into the head of a big cat to remind boxing fans that the boxers in question come from panther country. In another poster of the same year, Bouttier–Cohen (1974, figure 52), in effect one of Castiglioni's most startlingly effective images, the fist becomes the Gallic Cock, signaling the French national championships. The volcano image, repeatedly used by Castiglioni in his boxing posters, is especially appropriate in the poster advertising the fight between the Italian

boxers Ardito and Salvemini (1982). Here the Etna of Ardito's enormous fist succeeds in subjugating that of Salvemini beneath the azure sky of Florence. In the Menetrey–Backus poster (1974), a fist emerges from the water as a sea monster, marking the quasimythical dimension of boxing champions such as Menetrey, while in the Valdès–Cohen poster of 1975, the boxing glove, a solid lump of rock, becoming separated from a mountain, floats like a mauve balloon in the sky. This image of the *heavyweight's* *lightness* clearly evokes one of the paradoxes of boxing, a sport in which the speed to weight ratio is of the utmost importance. The idea of strength and flexibility is also expressed in the De Oliveria–O'Bed poster (1975), in which the boxers' strength is symbolized in the amalgamation of boxing glove and oak tree, the dew dripping from the latter representing the sweat of the battling contestants. In the Valdès–Cohen poster of 1976, the boxing glove becomes a blasted tree whipped by rain and March winds, announcing a stormy contest, full of lightning flashes and thunderclaps. In the Tonna–Mateo poster of 1976, the bout is anticipated as a primordial Big Bang so powerful that even the boxers' fists explode. The image also evokes the stars reputedly seen by the boxer who suffers a knockout; in the event, Mateo was knocked out by Tonna. The cosmic metaphor is developed in the poster advertising the Zarate–Rodriguez bout in 1977 in which the four gloved hands effectively eclipse the light, in anticipation of the knockout Rodriguez will suffer in round five.

The surrealist intensity of these images consciously or unconsciously reflects the work of artists such as Hans Bellmer (1902–75) and René Magritte (1898–1967), whose influence is visible in a number of Castiglioni posters, especially those that *metonymize* parts of the human physique. So, in the Cohen–Griffith poster (1973, figure 53) two vital elements of the boxer's body, the eye and the fist, become a machine, combining to form a kind of pugilistic Cyclops that recalls Hans Bellmer's erotically charged assemblages of dolls' limbs (see *La Poupée*, 1935–36; figure 54). An equally striking image of the vital coordination of brain and fist perfected by the boxing champion is that of the Monzon–Griffith poster (1973), in which Monzon's physique is surmounted not by his head but by a third boxing glove (it seems that Castiglioni was confident that the champion, Carlos Monzon, would retain his title). The caricatural potential of this image is extended in the Ali–Norton poster (1976) where the noisy boasting of the world champion Muhammad Ali is

expressed by his mouth, shown wide open. The two boxers' heads are furthermore superimposed on their gloves which in turn become transformed into giant windmills in a landscape, stressing the Don Quixote-like nature of this famous confrontation. In the Monzon-Valdès poster (1977), the boxer's trunk literally becomes a tree trunk from which four pairs of gloved hands emerge to form a "victory tree." It appears once again that Castiglioni was confident that Monzon would win this fight, the last in a brilliant career of 102 contests, of which fifteen were world championships.

For another contest in which Valdès figured, Castiglioni devised the poster for Briscoe-Valdès (1974; figure 55), which most clearly illustrates the metonymic glove-hand transformation. The artist explained that "these two punchers inspired the metamorphosis of the glove into the hand, because the power of each of their blows was the equivalent, for me, of two punches with gloves off." The influence of René Magritte's painting *Le Modèle rouge* (1935; figure 56) is clearly evident here. Another highly surrealist image is that of the Arcari-Ortiz poster (1974) in which the victorious fist is raised above the profiles of two unconscious boxers. The choice of tender pink and violet shades and the delicate curves of the boxers' facial profiles transform this poster into a quasideiric vision which, though expressing the violence of boxing, seems to do so as in a poetic dream. An even more tender image of boxing is that proposed by the poster "Boxe éducative" (1975; figure 64), in which a rosebud opens, giving birth to a the pink body of a young boxer against a blue background. Castiglioni thus uses a cliché drawn from love poetry to promote the gentle art of boxing among the young. We will end this inventory with the most economical of all Castiglioni's boxing posters, that promoting the Monzon-Tonna fight (1975; figure 36), which expresses the essential characteristics of the sport in a few fragmentary and metonymic images. So the color red expresses heat, the drops of water, sweat; the ropes of the ring, the tension of the fight; the explosion, the knockout blow in which the match will end in round five, thus assuring yet another victory for Castiglioni's favorite champion, Carlos Monzon.

The boxing posters of the Swiss artist Claude Kuhn (b. 1948), formerly Kuhn-Klein, produced from the 1980s (figures 57–62), use visual metaphor as the structural principle of the poster in a way similar to that used by Castiglioni (of whose work Kuhn says he was not familiar). But, as we shall see,

Kuhn also systematically exploits the verbal aspect of the boxing images he proposes, using all sorts of puns and wordplay. In the Scacchia–Martorini poster (1986; figure 60) he adopts a modified version of the boxer–rosebud image used by Castiglioni in 1975. In Kuhn’s case, however, the rose bush produces not a red bud but a boxing glove. Kuhn plays here on the ambiguity of the rose bud–boxing glove relationship: both items are destined for the nose but their contact with this latter is calculated to produce diametrically opposite effects: pleasure and pain.

In his poster word games, Kuhn mostly plays on the verbal associations of the words “box,” “boxing,” “shadow-boxing,” and so on (English remaining the premier language in boxing as in many other British-invented sports). So in a 1989 poster for Scacchia–Harris (figure 62), the pun is on “boxing gloves,” where it is the gloves themselves, not the boxers, who set to, having sprouted legs to support their leather bodies. In the 1989 Boxing Day poster (figure 58), the habit of Charly Bühler’s boxing club in Berne of staging fights on the day after Christmas, Boxing Day, gives rise to a play on words that is further enriched by a visual pun in which the image of the bull’s-eye or target is shown to be the eye that, in hitting, each boxer will hope to blacken in his opponent. In another Boxing Day poster (1988), the fighters become two boxer dogs, whose flattened noses gave rise to their name. In the Scacchia–Segor poster (1985), the play is on the name of the toy “Jack in a box,” where instead of Jack it is the boxing glove that explodes into view as the lid is lifted, prefiguring the punch that will determine the outcome of the match. In the 1991 Meuret–Pemberton poster (figure 57), it is the bodies of the two boxers that mime the letters KO, a message that each will, in the match, strive to communicate to his opponent.

The Meuret–Pemberton poster in effect underlines the aim of the boxing poster that is, literally, to *give body* to the words that constitute its message: here the body is read as a letter or word. In a Boxing Day poster of 1983 (figure 61), Kuhn plays on the term *shadow boxing*, an exercise in which the boxer (or anyone else) boxes his own shadow projected against a wall or the ground. In Kuhn’s poster, it is literally the shadows of the boxers that box, projected into the central part of the poster by the bodies of the fighters themselves, which are marginalized in the extreme upper part of the image frame. In other posters of the 1980s, Kuhn adapts the black and white minstrel show

technique seen sixty years before in Auerbach-Levy's Al Jolson poster of 1927. In one poster the boxers are dark cherubs against a deep blue background, the only other colors being the green gloves of one combatant and the white stars that he sees as he receives a left jab in the nose. In two other posters in this "black and white" style, all we see of the boxers is their singlets, shorts, boots, gloves, and a glimpse of gum-shield, in white or bright color against a black background. As the eye shifts from one patch of color to the next, an illusion of movement is created, a strobelike effect that mimics the jerky movements of the boxers. Finally, the indexical function of these metonymic signs is clearly shown in our final example of Kuhn's posters, the Scacchia-Profigkämpf of 1987 (figure 59) in which a road warning sign is used not only to alert boxing fans to the forthcoming match but also to put them on their guard against the punches likely to be thrown by the boxers shown in the sign.

To summarize, the function of visual metonymies in boxing posters is to isolate a specific aspect of the object in order to deepen or multiply its metaphorical associations. In this way the poster artist succeeds in creating images that are both new—sometimes even bizarre—and yet legible. The observer or passerby is drawn by the vividness or strangeness of the image, his or her comprehension of the poster message assuring adhesion to the product or event advertised. At the same time, the practice of sophisticated poster artists, in presenting aspects of boxing as a fragment or a metonymy or in playing on the ambiguity of boxing terminology, heightens the viewer's awareness of some of the ambivalences or even paradoxes intrinsic to the sport. Not the least arresting of these latter is the fact that boxing, while a sport or game, nevertheless has so much invested in it—on both a personal and national or communal level. Like the image in modern poetry, the poster image is particularly adept at creating paradoxes, ones that both compel and astonish. In the next chapter, we will see the extent to which this statement is also applicable to twentieth-century boxing poetry, whether surrealist or Dadaist.



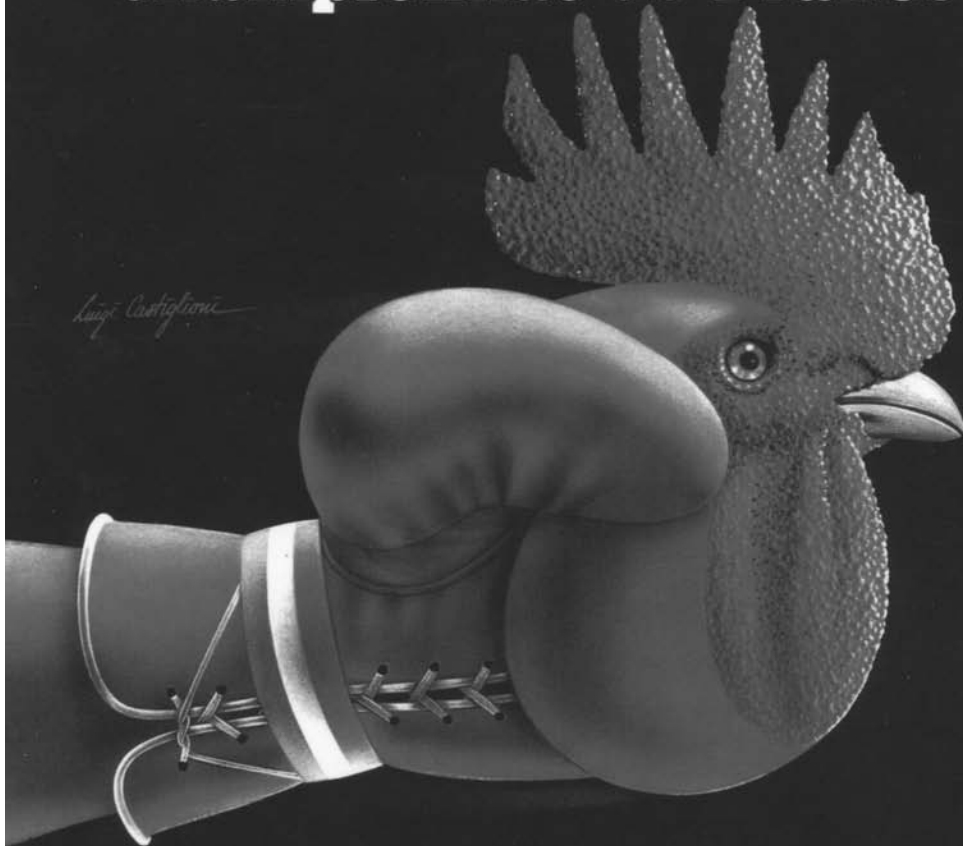
Figure 51. Luigi Castiglioni, Duran-Tavarez and Backus-Zami poster, 1974.
Courtesy of the estate of Luigi Castiglioni.

PALAIS DES EXPOSITIONS

Porte de Versailles

16 DECEMBRE 1974 A 20h30

Championnat de France



BOUTTIER • COHEN

SOUS LE PATRONAGE DU

NOUVEAU PARIS
MATCH

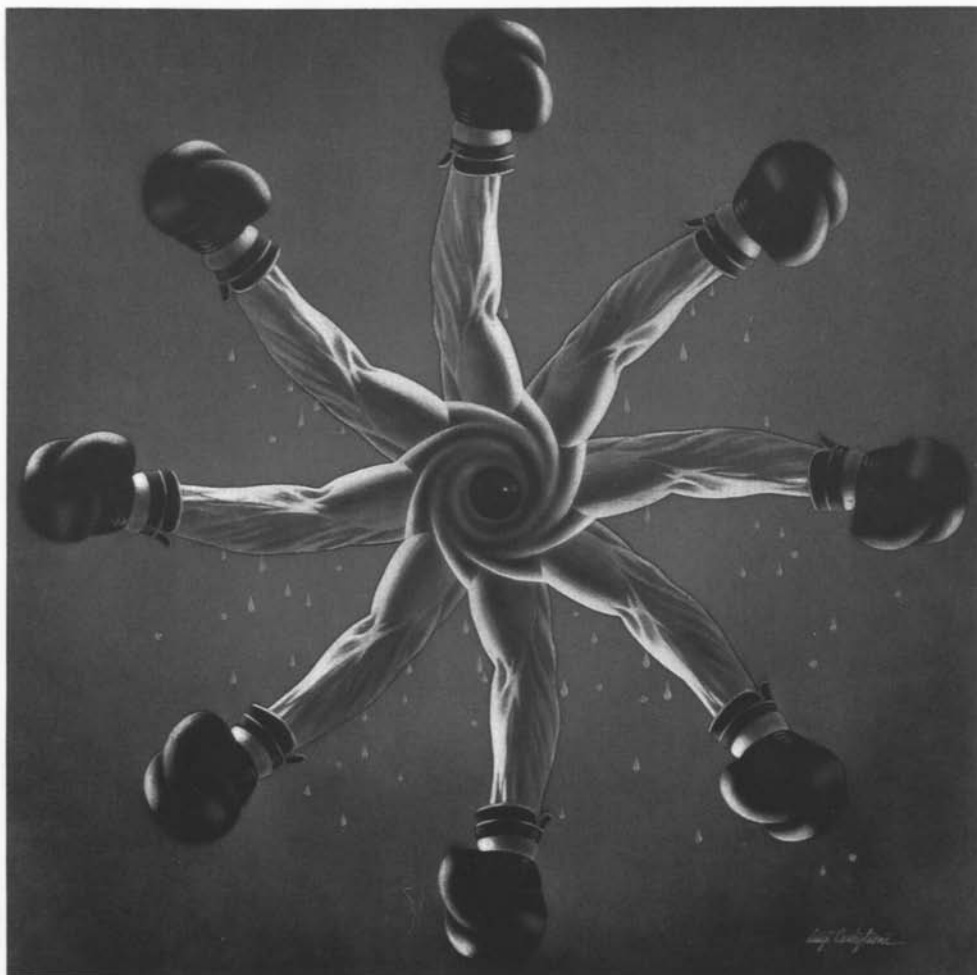
ET télé
7 JOURS

LOCATION : PALAIS DES SPORTS, 533.45.52
L'ÉQUIPE, 824.70.80
PRIX DES PLACES : 100 F à 500 F

Figure 52. Luigi Castiglioni, Bouttier–Cohen poster, 1974.
Courtesy of the estate of Luigi Castiglioni.

PALAIS DES SPORTS

12 mars 1973 à 20 h 15



COHEN-GRIFFITH

SOUS
LE PATRONAGE
DE



LOCATION : PALAIS DES SPORTS, 533-45-52
ÉQUIPE, 824-70-80

PRIX DES PLACES : 100 F A 400 F

Figure 53. Luigi Castiglioni, Cohen–Griffith poster, 1973.

Courtesy of the estate of Luigi Castiglioni.

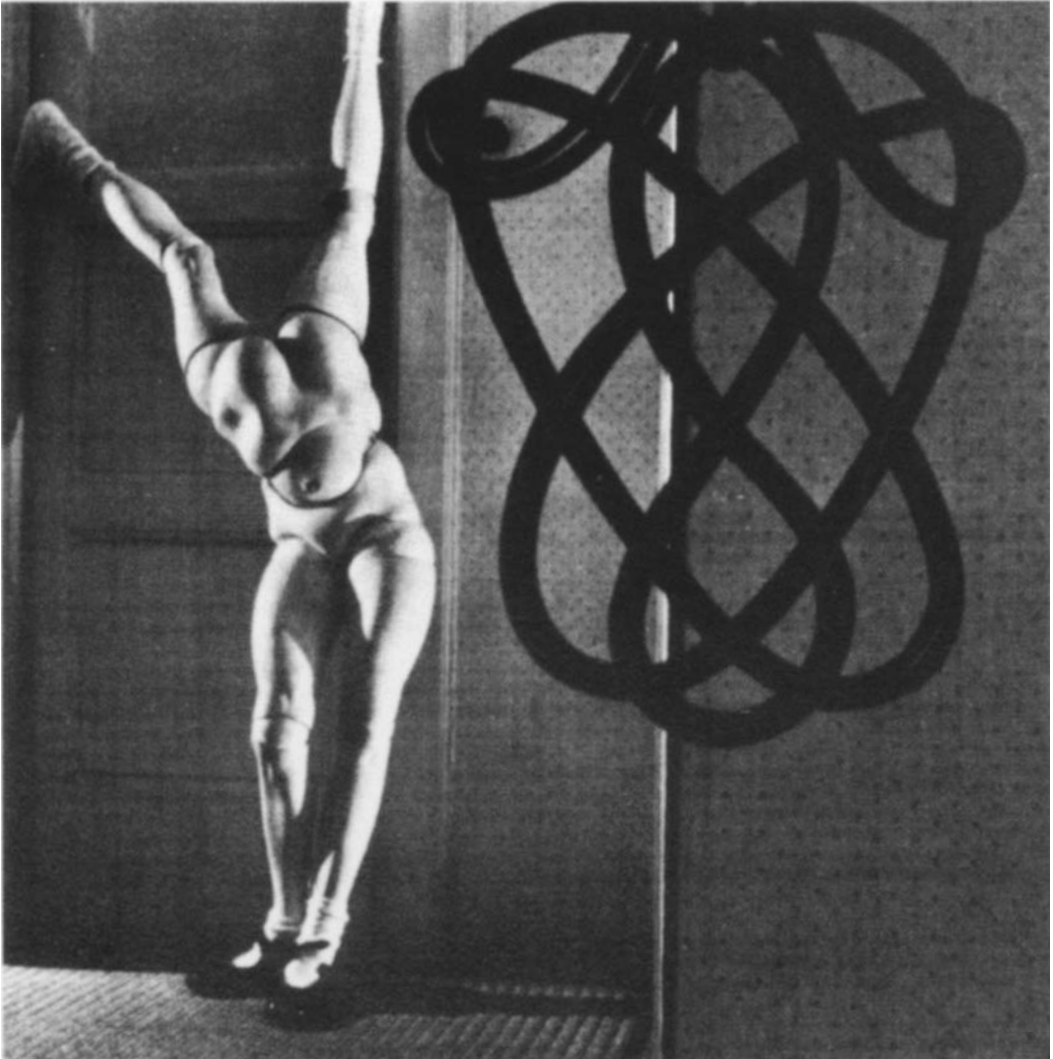


Figure 54. Hans Bellmer, *La Poupée*, 1935.
Photo by Editions Filipacci, Paris.

E.B.U.

A.S.M.

STADE LOUIS II • MONTE-CARLO
25 MAI 1974 À 21h
CHAMPIONNAT DU MONDE

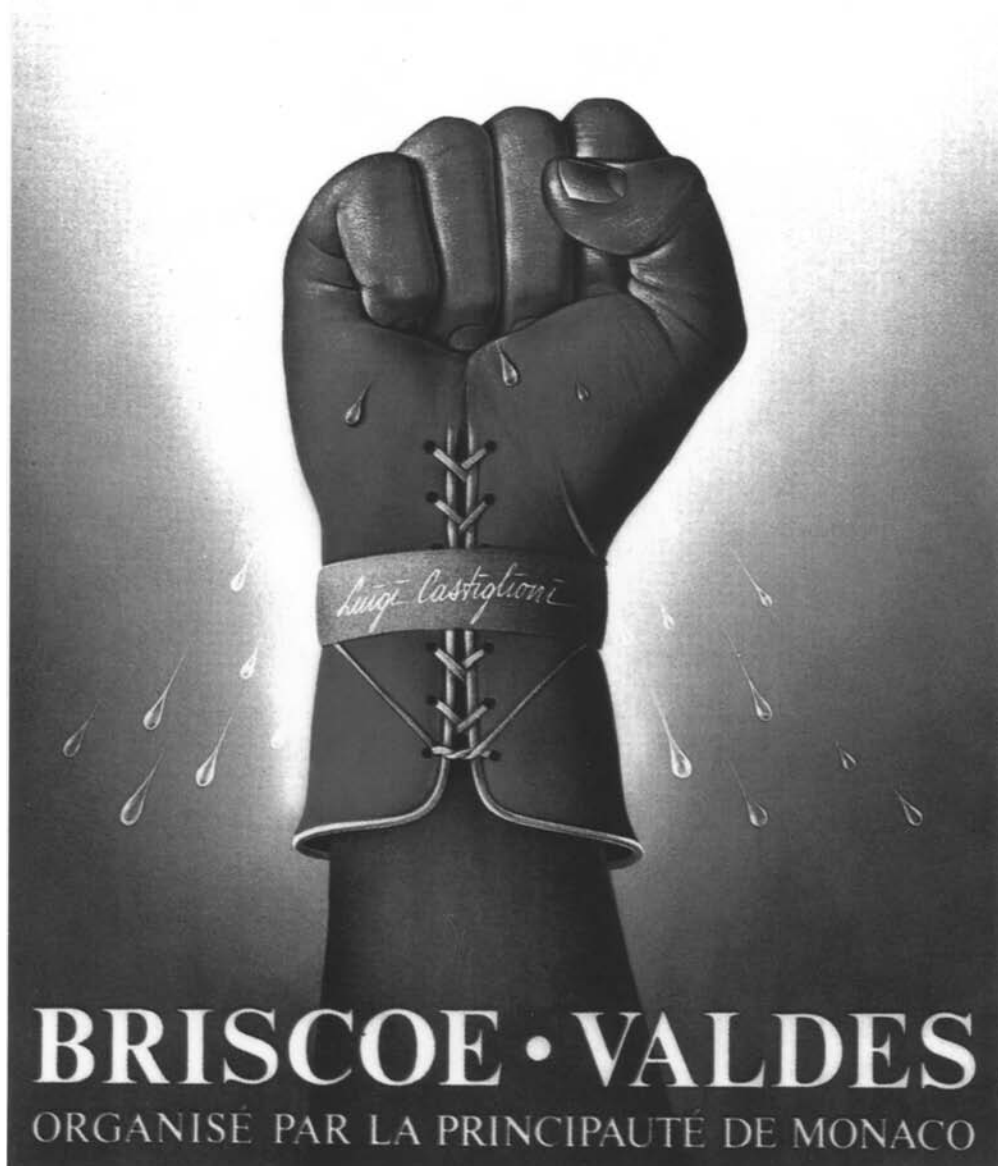


Figure 55. Luigi Castiglioni, Briscoe-Valdès poster. World championship, 1974.

Courtesy of the estate of Luigi Castiglioni.

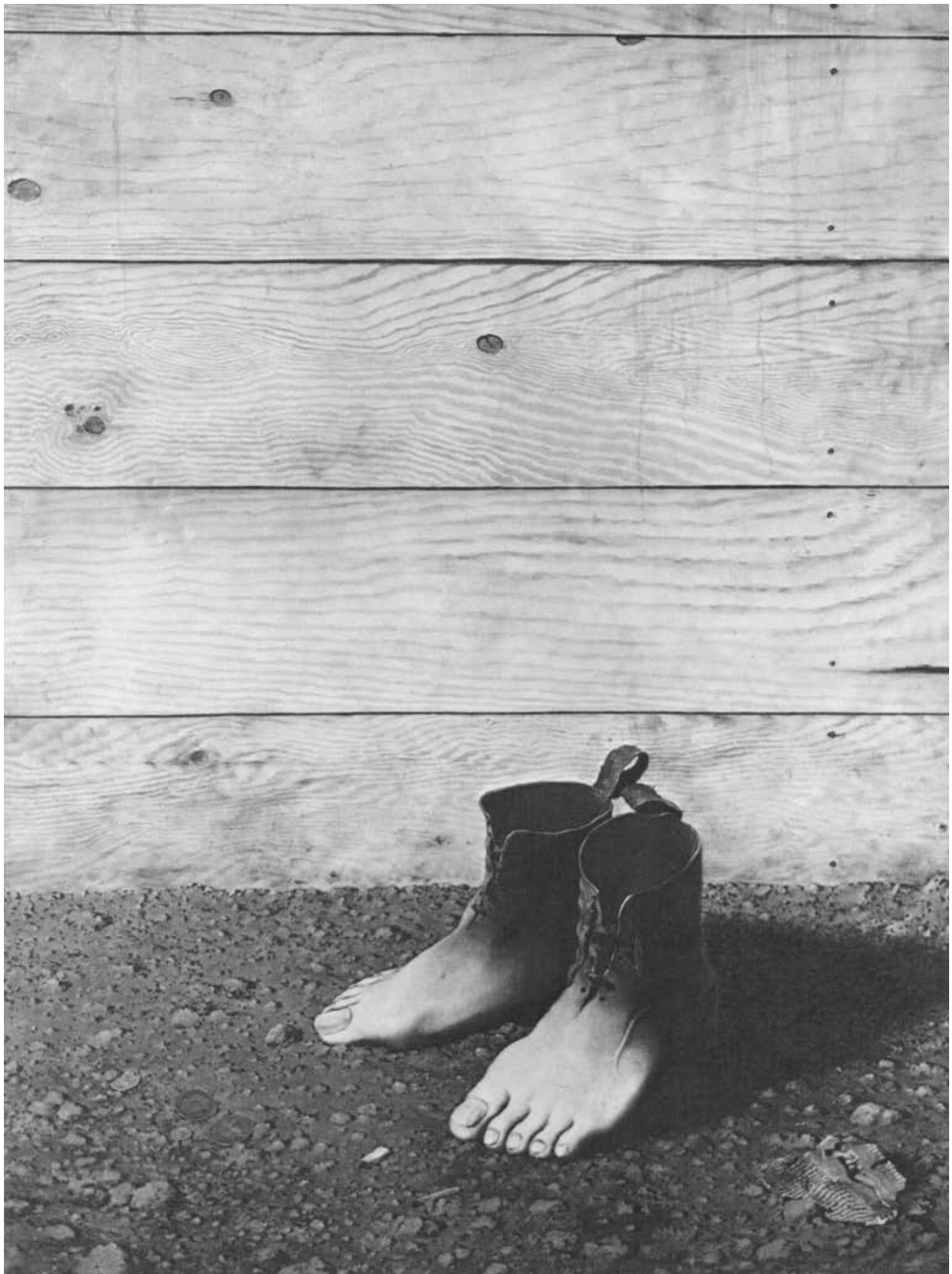


Figure 56. René Magritte, *Le Modèle rouge*, oil on canvas, ca. 1937.
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

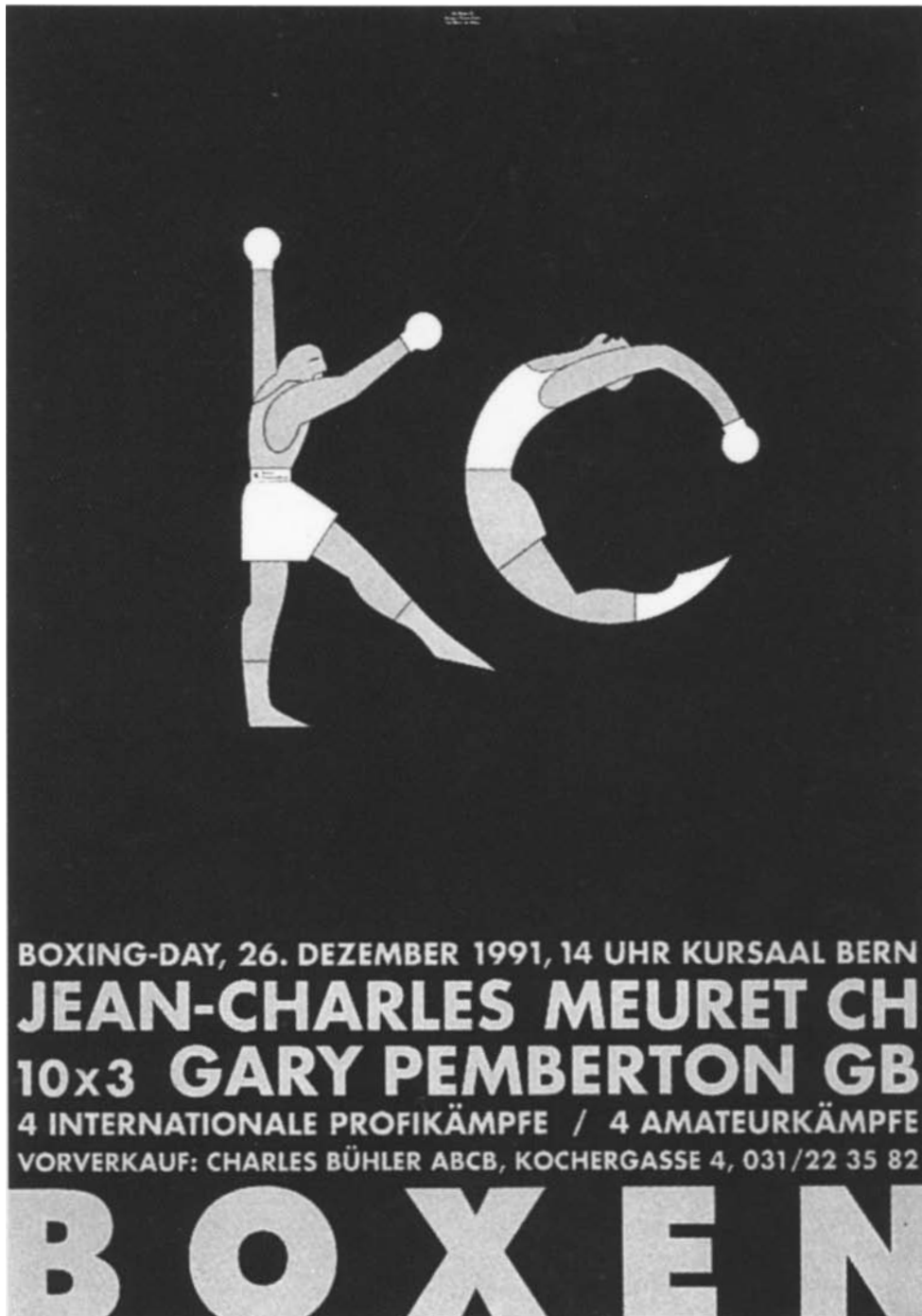


Figure 57. Claude Kuhn, “Boxen (KO)” poster, 1991.
Reproduced by permission of Claude Kuhn.



Figure 58. Claude Kuhn, "Boxen (Bull's Eye)" poster, 1989.
Reproduced by permission of Claude Kuhn.

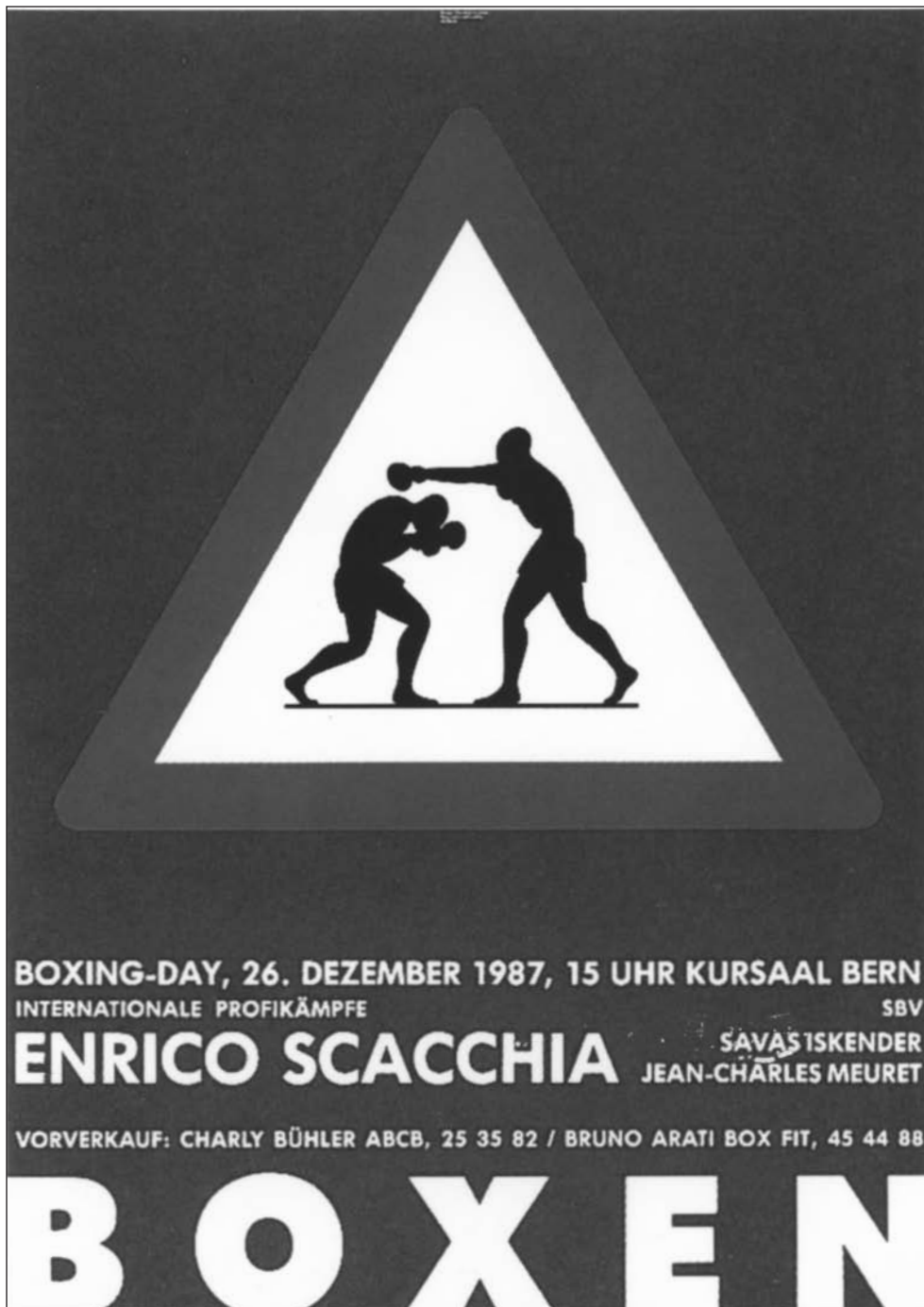


Figure 59. Claude Kuhn, "Boxen (Men Boxing)" poster, 1987.
Reproduced by permission of Claude Kuhn.



Figure 60. Claude Kuhn, "Boxen (Boxing Rosebud)" poster, 1986.
Reproduced by permission of Claude Kuhn.



Figure 61. Claude Kuhn, "Boxen (Shadow Boxing)" poster, 1983.
 Reproduced by permission of Claude Kuhn.

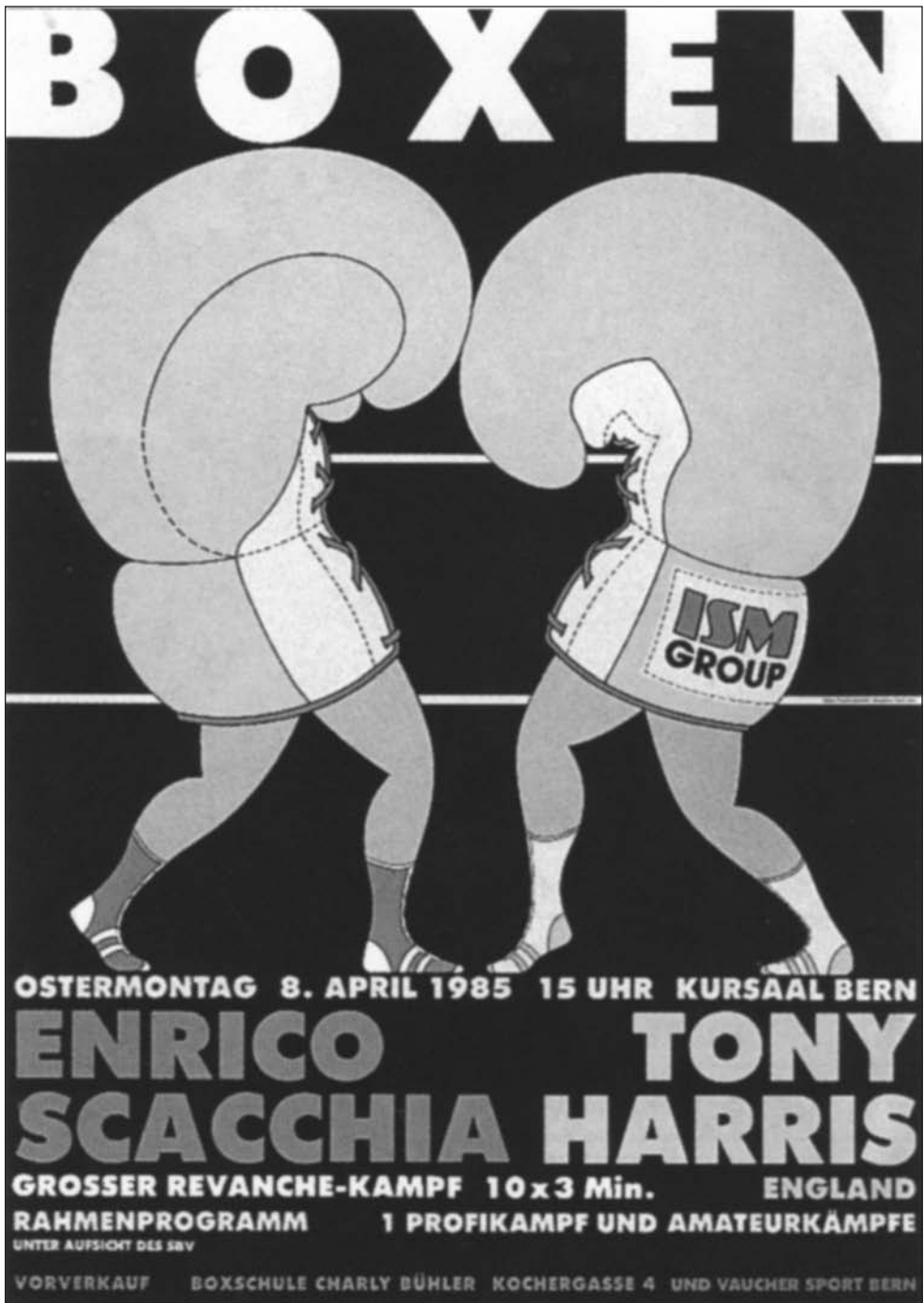


Figure 62. Claude Kuhn, "Boxen (Boxing Gloves)" poster, 1985.
Reproduced by permission of Claude Kuhn.



Writing Boxing

8. The Poetry of Boxing

*Genius is nothing more than an
extraordinary manifestation of the body.*

Arthur Cravan

They are moreover good friends.

Tristan Tzara

Dada and surrealist poetry, like cubist and futurist art, was quick to see the relevance and interest of modern cultural forms such as sport to life in a twentieth-century world. In particular after the degradation of the martial or military ideal after the débâcle of the First World War, sports such as boxing provided not only a relatively unsullied model of contemporary manliness but also renewed insight into the fragmentary nature of modern life, characterized as it was by new forms of speed, vitality, glamour, and violence, and fresh combinations of the physical and the technical. In addition, boxing, in its ambivalent combination of the ordered and the violent, the gentle and the manly, also represented paradoxes that the surrealists and other modernist writers and artists were discovering more generally in modern life. Providing an object of fantasy investment as well as real action, boxing could become a metaphor of love as well as conflict, a focus of visceral identification as well as scientific observation. Finally, the uniquely focalized theater of its action — the boxing ring, the training gym with its symmetrically activated equipment (punch balls, punching bags, skipping ropes, and other routines) — made of it an ideal microcosmic model of the organized dynamic of modern urban civilization.¹

Boxing and poetry find an early and vital identity in the life and writings

of the French-speaking English poet Arthur Cravan (1887–1918), self-styled “Poet and Boxer,” who was to become an inspiration not only to Dadaist and surrealist poets but also to artists much later in the century such as Philippe Perrin. Cravan, an eccentric in the English dandy tradition, combined in his life and work (the two were inseparable) provocation and order, violence and tenderness, bad taste and aesthetics. Boasting nineteen-inch biceps and exquisite sensitivity, Cravan was both an extrovert seeking secrecy and an introvert craving publicity, a figure who wanted, as Roger Conover perceptively comments, “his life to be both virtual and actual, to exist in conceptual as well as biological space” (1995, 26).² So as well as writing poetry that was extraordinary in its mixture of obscenity and finesse, he was also an enthusiastic and courageous boxer who in 1916 sought an encounter in Spain with the then world heavyweight champion Jack Johnson. The curious sculptured head entitled *Arthur Cravan après son combat contre Jack Johnson* (figure 63) created by the Spanish-born artist Eduardo Arroyo (b. 1937), in its simultaneously poignant and caricatural rendering of the surrealist boxer’s battle-scarred face, effectively expresses the paradoxes of Cravan’s stance as artist and fighter. The contrast between the soft stone, in two places stained with dull red, and the jagged cuts and stitches above the left eye and right cheek wonderfully evoke the toughness and vulnerability of the boxer and the tension between these two aspects that constitutes the particular fascination of boxing as a sport. Conover further underlines the paradoxes inherent in this poet–boxer stance when he writes, “In his masculine comportment was a feminine negotiation of opposites, a willing of reluctant inner brides. In the boxing ring, the figure thrusting and receiving was vulnerable and volatile, subtle and brute, respectful and taunting. In his stanzas, masculinity and femininity, anxiety and repose, eloquence and slang, sentiment and sexuality were likewise the diametric poles” (1995, 26).

In his poetry readings, Cravan was as strenuous as he was in his boxing matches, realizing that both forms of expression were a kind of performance *avant la lettre*—one that contemporary artists such as Philippe Perrin and James Coleman, as we have seen, later effortlessly combined in installation art. In the following poem, Cravan perfectly summarizes the modern poet’s perception of beauty in a technological, urban world in which, nevertheless, the impulses of the visceral body are as violent as ever:

THE POETRY OF BOXING

Hie!

What soul disputes my body?

I hear music

Will I be swept away?

I so adore dancing

And other physical foolishness

I feel it as plain

That had I been a young girl

I would have been utterly corrupted.

But, since I've already plunged myself

Into this illustrated review,

I can swear that I have never seen

Such enchanting photographs:

The lazy ocean cradles the funnels,

I see in the port, on the decks of the steamships,

Among the indiscriminate merchandise,

Sailors mixing with the stokers;

Bodies polished like machines,

A thousand things from China,

Fashions and inventions;

Then, ready to cross town

In the tranquility of automobiles,

Poets and boxers.

This evening, how great my disgust

That, despite so much sadness,

Everything seems beautiful?

The extraordinary paradox, underlined by Cravan, of boxing as an expression of aggression and beauty, violence and love, is explored in more systematically literary terms by other avant-garde French poets. For the Romanian Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), boxing's ambiguous status as a marginal cultural form and yet one that elicited immense popular enthusiasm and in which massive energy was invested made it an irresistible object for poetic expression. So, in Tzara's poem "Boxing" (the first of three parts, located on the following page), the apparently incoherent actions of the boxers,

BOXING

I

benches creak

look at the middle carpet

come

patience

passed

14

thanks

ATTENTION it's the wound that I am feeling
A lamp mother-of-pearl tumour

crimson chalk

Suddenly a corner that falls

A few cards

hustle arteries in the dark

Drum with stretched leather fists

Suspended cowbells enlarged roll beneath the magnifying glass

specialised on the

aggravated slowness

reserved surprises cancelled in this performance

(The Management)

professional grotesque

: preface ambiguity tired

let them blow

THE WHISTLE

What?

To believe eyes of gall

effect

Have forgotten the sky's pall

Reflect

— But I don't believe

— They are moreover good friends

the irregular pattern of their movements within the confines of the ring, the varying power and impact of their punches, the strobeflike effect of the action on the viewer, are contained and expressed within the stable space of the poem. This poem, like a series of cinematographic frames, can, like the film loop from the Dempsey–Tunney fight used by James Coleman in his installation *Box* (figure 50), be reread indefinitely, each reading offering a different take on the multiple configurations that constitute boxing as a simultaneity of actions.

Many original linguistic formulas here—the “stretched leather fists,” “Suddenly a corner that falls”—express the paradoxes for which contemporary cubist–art deco and surrealist artists such as Uzelac and Magritte (figures 32, 56) and graphic or poster artists such as Garretto and Castiglioni (figures 34 and 64) will find a visual equivalent. Blood and bruises (“crimson chalk,” “a lamp mother-of-pearl tumour”) are already expressed in terms that invite artistic transformation in visual terms, suggesting the kind of visual puns that an artist such as Rio Branco (figures 47, 48), and Kuhn (figures 57–62) and Arroyo (figure 63), will later exploit, while the poem’s expression of a simultaneity of aural and tactile as well as visual and kinetic stimuli will also find its equivalent in works such as that of Uzelac (figure 32) or Coleman (figure 50). The final paradox of the poem—the suggestion that despite the violence of the boxers’ onslaught on each other “They are moreover good friends”—is one that finds expression not only in the tender images of surrealist poetry but also in the boxing posters of Castiglioni.

The most radical expression of this paradox is no doubt that of the surrealist poet Paul Eluard (1895–1952), of whose poem “Boxeur” (from *Les Nécessités de la vie et les conséquences des rêves*, 1921) many of Castiglioni’s posters might have been illustrations:

Oh! et le charme d’un poing énorme, agité
 Ballon d’assaut,
 Cœur bien placé
 (Le cœur bat à sa hauteur)
 Sauteur
 Et non de peur

WRITING BOXING

[Oh the charm of an enormous fist, punching the air,
Barrage balloon
Well-placed heart
(The heart beats at this level)
Jumping
But not out of fear]

Here, as with Castiglioni, the fist or boxing glove image is the nucleus of a number of metaphorical associations, clarified by the successive enumeration of details. The raised fist is shaken; it is like an assault balloon or punch ball; it beats at the same level as the heart (“Le cœur bat à sa hauteur”). The boxer’s fist, gloved in the red or brown leather of the boxing glove, strangely resembles a human heart. Like the heart (and the punch-ball), the fist beats (*bat*). But the heart is jumping: it jumps for joy (*plaisir*) and not out of fear (*Et non de peur*). The boxer’s gloved fist thus becomes as much an image of love—that of the awakened heart, beating with pleasure and excitement—as of physical aggression.

This sort of metaphorical transformation of language has, of course, become conventional in poetry since the nineteenth century. The evolution of analogous transformations in the visual sphere is more recent, dating from the early twentieth century. It was surrealism, in particular, that sought in painting and in the visible world the metaphorical transformations activated in poetry since the time of Rimbaud and Lautréamont, and it is in the work of surrealist artists such as Magritte and Dali that, as we have seen, we find many of the techniques exploited in modern publicity posters such as those of Castiglioni and Kuhn.



Figure 63. Eduardo Arroyo, *Le Boxeur*. Arthur Cravan après son combat contre Jack Johnson, stone, 1994. Olympic Museum, Lausanne. Reproduced by permission of Eduardo Arroyo.

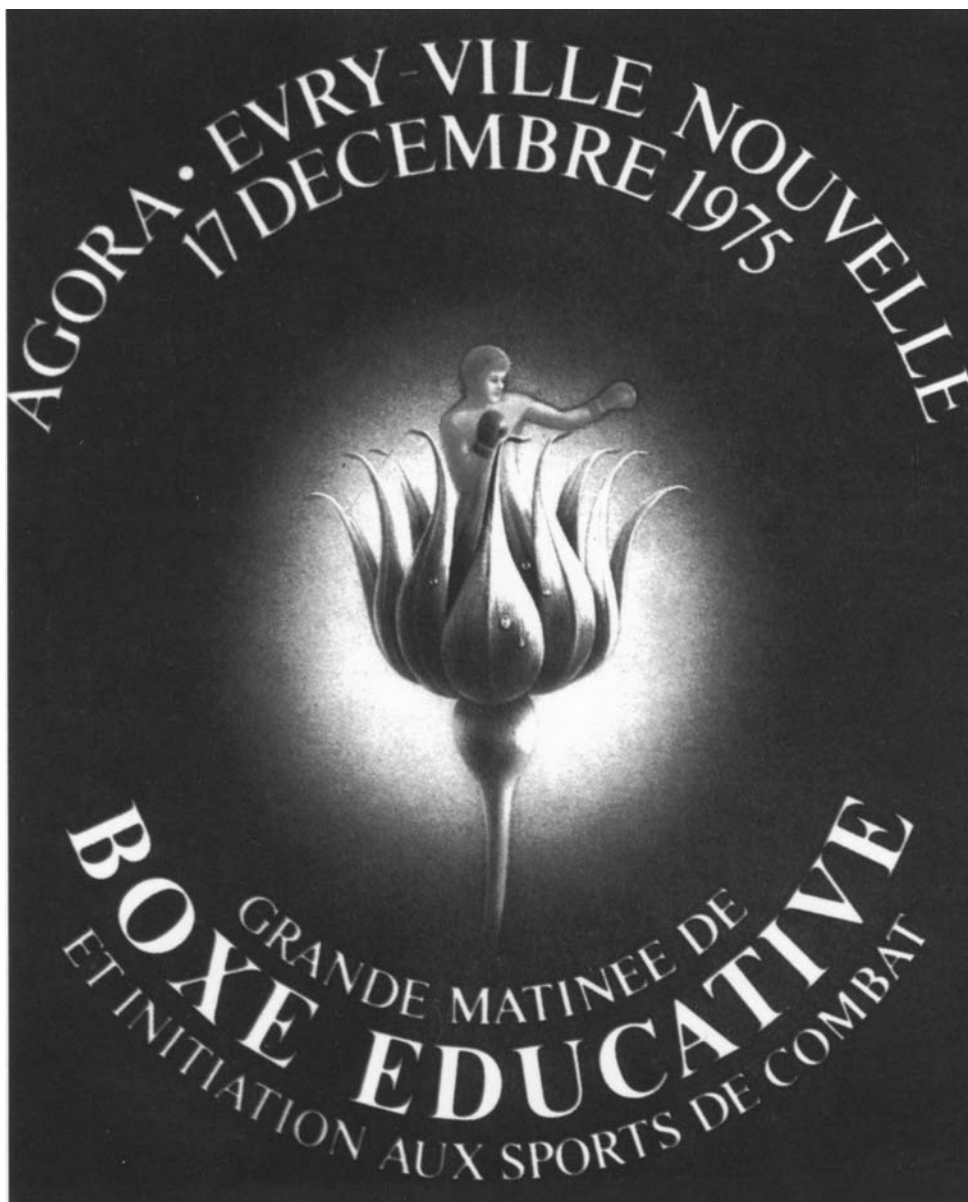


Figure 64. Luigi Castiglioni, "Boxe éducative" poster, 1975.
Courtesy of the estate of Luigi Castiglioni.

9. Boxing and Modern Masculinity

The place combined pleasantly the scholarly and the athletic, the leather of books and the leather of boxing gloves.

Vladimir Nabokov

Three punches, 1-2-3, the fruit of centuries of practice, mathematically exhaust the thousand useless alternative possibilities risked by the inexperienced. Three punches—complete, irresistible, indisputable.

Maurice Maeterlinck

Boxing, or similar forms of sport that put all into a rational system, was therefore a kind of theology.

Robert Musil

[Boxing] permits a man to behave in a way that is beyond and above his normal capacity.

Vernon Scannell

Boxing is a form of kitsch, which explains why so many intellectuals have been attracted to it.

Gerald Early

At the same time—around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—that the modern conventions and practice of boxing, both amateur and professional, were codified and perfected, so also were the techniques and equipment related to boxing training. As I mentioned in chapter 2, punching bags and weights were already used by the ancient Greeks, who regularly

trained in purpose-built gymnasiums. The revival of boxing in England in the eighteenth century brought with it further refinements in training methods and equipment. As we saw, Broughton introduced the use of mufflers or gloves in boxing training and set up properly organized training routines in a purpose-built gymnastic space. The English boxer Tom Owens, who fought over thirty years from the 1790s to the 1820s (until well into his fifties), is credited with the invention of the modern metal dumbbell, while in the mid-nineteenth century, American world champion boxers such as John C. Heenan were training using punching bags filled with thirty pounds of sand. By the beginning of the twentieth century, English sports equipment manufacturers such as Spalding were advertising a complete range of boxing training gear—including speed bags, punching bags, double-ended bags, training gloves, fighting gloves, and boxing boots (figures 66–69)—that scarcely differ from those in use today, a hundred years later. The modern boxing glove “with white welting, bar grip, laced palm, padded wrist, horsehair stuffed” (Spalding ad in Tosswill 1923) was already as it is today, bar the horsehair and the current option of Velcro fastenings instead of laces for training gloves.

The aesthetic aspect of early modern boxing equipment—with its “brown English grain leather, hand-sewn throughout,” its white piping, its “lined twill, double stitched, red welted seams”—and the sensual pleasure it afforded (visual, tactile, olfactory) still constitute today a not insignificant part of the pleasure of the sport, as is attested to by today’s catalogs of boxing equipment, some of which run to nearly two hundred pages of enticing advertisement. More important, it is interesting to see how quickly the punch ball (figures 66, 67) and boxing gloves as signs of masculinity make their appearance in autobiography and fiction from the early twentieth century onward. So, for example, the young Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977) fondly evokes in his autobiographical text *Speak, Memory* (1967) his father’s library at the beginning of the twentieth century in which regular training in fencing and boxing took place: “The place combined pleasantly the scholarly and the athletic, the leather of books and the leather of boxing gloves. Fat armchairs stood along the book-lined walls. An elaborate ‘punching ball’ affair purchased in England—four steel posts supporting the board from which the pear-shaped striking bag hung—gleamed at the end of the spacious room” (141). Here the leather smell of books and boxing gloves are visceral signs of the

father's presence as master of language and the law as well as of the manly arts. Another aspect of boxing as masculine discipline is evoked by Nabokov in his description of the disciplinary measures of one of his tutors, who, as a punishment, would engage him in rounds of sparring in which he would be punched in the face "with stinging accuracy" (123). The purpose of Nabokov's father's punching bag was later questioned by the Russian revolutionaries who broke in through the windows of the Nabokov mansion in 1917. Only a decade or so later we discover in the dressing room of Robert Musil's *Man without Qualities* a similar ceiling-suspended punching bag that the eponymous hero would strike with a strength, speed, and accuracy he prided himself on as fully as his equivalent intellectual qualities.

The paradoxical relation between fighting and boxing, modern military aggression with its explosive weapons and the more humanized forms of physical struggle, is also explored at the turn of the twentieth century by the Belgian symbolist poet and dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949), Nobel Prize winner in 1911. In the light of Darwinian and other evolutionary theories, Maeterlinck argues in his essay *In Praise of Boxing* (ca. 1900) for the appropriateness of living forms adapting by intelligent selection to their circumstances and environment. Just as animals use the appropriate strengths or attributes of their bodies—the horse's hoof, the bull's horns—to defend themselves, so the principal form of human self-protection should be the fist, and all conflict between men should be resolved using such a weapon. In other words, men should defend themselves and settle differences, as many members of the English pro-boxing fraternity were already suggesting in the eighteenth century, through the manly art of boxing, where the word manly is understood to embrace all its connotations (virile, virtuous, courageous, decent). So in promoting boxing as a general solution to human problems, Maeterlinck argues that

On the pain of committing an unpardonable crime against the fundamental laws of the human species, a wiser race would prohibit any other form of combat. After several generations would be established a sort of awe-inspired respect for human life. And what a prompt selection, perfectly in tune with the will of nature, would the intensive practice of boxing bring, in which all the hopes of military glory would be invested! For selection is, after all, the only really important thing we should be preoccupied by: it is the first, the vastest and the most eternal of our duties to the species. (ca. 1900, 194–95)

In a way similar to Maeterlinck, boxing is singled out by Robert Musil (1880–1942), who also practiced the sport himself, at least on the level of training, till his death, as being an activity representative of modern life and modern manliness. Combining as it does swiftness of reflex and logic of actions, boxing enables man to experience, as the following passage makes clear, the full potentiality of his being as an intellectual animal:

Life had to look for some other image of manliness. While looking round for this . . . it made the discovery that the tricks and dodges used by an inventive mind in going through the logical operations of a mathematical problem are not really very different from the ring-craft displayed by a well-trained body; there is a general psychological fighting-strength that is made cold and shrewd by difficulties and improbabilities, whether what is trained to search out is the vulnerable spot in the problem or that in the physical opponent. If one were to analyze a powerful mind and a champion boxer from the psycho-technical point of view, it would in fact turn out that their cunning, their courage, their precision and their combinatory ability, as well as the quickness of their reactions on the territory that they have made their own, are approximately equal . . . But apart from this there is one other advantage that . . . a boxer [has] over a great mind, and that is that their achievement and importance can be indisputably assessed and that the best among them is really acknowledged as the best. In this way, sport and functionalism have deservedly come into their own, displacing the out-of-date conception of genius and human greatness. (1930, 47)

In this way, boxing also provides in a post-religious, post-heroic, post-World War One world a system of values adequate to the demands of purpose, exhilaration, and challenge experienced as fully by twentieth-century as by earlier man. So, the casual violence of the punch-up can be rationalized and rendered socially and aesthetically decorous by boxing, and the wilder masculine impulses regulated into socially acceptable and enjoyable channels. In the process, participant and spectator can come to feel, in different ways, some of the ecstasy formerly supplied by religious or other highly charged ritual observances, phenomena that can be theorized, as Musil suggests in the passage below, as a kind of modern theology:

such battle experiences [punch-ups] ought not to be judged by their outcome. Their charm in fact was that one had, in the smallest space of time, at a speed not occurring

anywhere else in civil life, and guided by scarcely perceptible signs, to perform movements so many, various, vigorous and nevertheless so precisely coordinated that it became quite impossible to supervise them with the conscious mind. On the contrary, every sportsman knew that training had to be stopped several days before the contest, and this for no other reason than that the muscles and nerves might be enabled to reach a final agreement among themselves, without the volition, intentions, and consciousness being involved or having any say at all. Then, in the moment of the act, what always happened . . . was that the muscles and nerves fought and leapt together with the ego. This, however, the entity of the body, the soul, the will—this whole and chief person as identified by civil law—was only swept along by them like something perched on top, like Europa on the bull's back, and whenever it was not like that, whenever anything went wrong and let the smallest ray of conscious thought fall into this darkness, then the whole operation was bound to fail. . . . this experience of almost complete ecstasy or transcending of the conscious personality—was related to a now lost kind of experience that had been known to the mystics of all religions, and hence it was, in a way, a contemporary substitute answering to eternal needs; even if a poor one, still, at least, it was one. Boxing, or similar forms of sport that put all into a rational system, was therefore a kind of theology. (1930, 26–27)

The considerable number of writers in the post–World War Two era who have attempted to rationalize this “theology” can be divided broadly into two camps that roughly coincide with the two different general views of boxing that I outlined in my introduction. On the American side, writers such as Joyce Carol Oates and Gerald Early explore boxing in later twentieth-century America—in particular in its professional guise—in terms of the problematic issues of race and masculinity, while on the other side, an English writer and former boxer such as Vernon Scannell (b. 1922) focuses more on the general and positive aspects of boxing as a lyrical expression of male potentiality. A brief analysis of these contrasting but complementary perspectives on boxing is offered here by way of conclusion.

Boxing seems in the later twentieth century undoubtedly to have loomed larger in the popular construction of masculinity in America than in England, and it has been deeply affected by the major contribution of black American athletes to the sport—of whom, as Early convincingly argues (1994, 46, 65), Floyd Patterson, Sonny Liston, and Muhammad Ali constitute the three

main types. For Early, like Rauch (1992, 252), boxing is a metaphor for the philosophical and social condition of modern man in mass society (1994, xiv), providing a theater in which his insecurity on the level of identity may be acted out—an insecurity complicated further by racial and economic factors. Even white writers such as Norman Mailer, Early argues, have to factor blackness into their account of boxing, in view both of the massive input of black fighters into the sport and what this input symbolizes in social and philosophical terms. So for Early, modern, industrialized man is marginalized and isolated, having little control over his destiny and living a life of increasingly vicarious satisfactions. Boxing expresses the neurosis of his condition in its melodramatic, even kitsch, dramatization of violence and rebellion, one that is controlled precisely by the forces (social and economic) against which the boxers are, if not always consciously, expressing their resistance through fighting. Jean-Paul Sartre develops this argument in part two of his *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1985, 26–60) to show how the tensions inherent in modern capitalist society find their incarnation in professional boxing in which the (generally) proletarian boxer, instead of identifying in solidarity with his own class (the working class), is alienated both from it and from the bourgeois world he is obliged to enter as a professional fighter.¹

While plainly democratic, professional boxing in America is primarily a sport for the underdog, more particularly the black or ethnic underdog, one offering the chance of a narrow, dangerous, yet relatively glamorous passage out of a dead-end position in a racially and economically unequal society. Boxing offers the illusion of the possibility of male assertion through courage, discipline, and strength, even if these heroic qualities, directed only ultimately toward a form of mass entertainment, no longer relate in any real sense to the values underlying modern mass society. As Early argues in his chapter “The Romance of Toughness: LaMotta and Graziano” (1994, 86–109), boxing becomes an increasingly popular but also vicarious response to the undirected male energies at play in an egalitarian consumer society. Sport and, in particular, boxing thus becomes a “traumatic romance where complete rationality of aspiration meets the utter irrationality of act” or vice versa (92). The psychotic or, at least, anarchic, potentiality of boxing—or, more properly bare-knuckle fighting—in this respect is explored in Chuck Palahnuik’s *Fight Club* (1997), in which male combat not only brings contemporary

man squarely back into confrontation with the real but also proposes, if only on a fantasy level, the illusion of the possibility of changing the world.

In contrast, Vernon Scannell's take on modern boxing is more in line with a white, European, sportsmanlike tradition in which, although many of the issues of neurotic masculinity as explored by Early and Palahnuick are still present, they are compensated or alleviated by other factors. For Scannell, boxing is more of *game* in the aesthetic as well as the social sense and, perhaps because less entrammelled in the modern European tradition with racial and economic issues, can offer a less-complicated form of enjoyment on the part both of boxer and spectator. Scannell thus emphasizes the physical excitement and pleasure as well as dread and pain associated with the sport and stresses its potential as a measure of individual male destiny perhaps less fraught with wider social resonances than is the case with Early in the black American context. Like Nabokov and Musil, Scannell is attuned to the sensuous aspect of the boxing gym of which he gives an evocative account in his novel *Ring of Truth*:

You went in through a door on the right and in front of you, in a row across the room, had been suspended four heavy punch-bags. On your immediate left, running the entire length of the gym, was a plasterboard wall which concealed three showers, a toilet and dressing accommodation with two massage tables and a set of weighing-in scales, two long seats and pegs for a dozen boxers' clothes. On your right, two speed-balls were attached at intervals of twenty feet to their platforms in the wall and the main space of the gym was occupied by two ground-level, single-rope boxing rings. At the furthest end more shelves had been erected against the facing wall and on these lay training gloves and headguards. On the walls above the shelves had been stuck posters advertising past and future boxing shows. The smell of sweat and rubbing oils was strong and although familiar to Dave the first whiff as he entered the gym always stirred feelings of excitement. It was the scent of his earliest ambitions, of promise and threat, danger and glory. He knew he would always be thrilled by it. (1983, 193)

In his essay "Why I Enjoy Boxing" (1963), Scannell links in a more concentrated form the appeal of boxing, in all its paradoxes, to the equally contradictory makeup of modern man. Like Musil, Scannell evokes the ecstatic nature of the boxing experience, whether that of the nervous anticipation before the event or the exhilaration, both mental and physical, of the combat itself. Like

Musil, he emphasizes the synthesizing dynamic of boxing in which “the contest is so totally absorbing of all faculties, physical and mental, that it seems no part of the mind, conscious or sub-conscious, is free to record details of sensation” (42). Again, like Musil, Scannell is deeply sensitive to the aesthetic appeal of boxing, to the way it organizes into a harmonious event sensations, actions, fantasies, and impulses that would otherwise remain unfocused. He compares the “functional economy” of boxing as a sport (43) to that of poetry as a form of literary creation, suggesting that “both the fighter and the poet should have mastered all the orthodox manœuvres yet be able to modify and adapt them as new and surprising problems are presented” (43). He is also, like the French poets discussed in chapter 8, aware of the paradoxical impulses of love and aggression inherent to boxing, the “feeling of remarkable well-being and . . . glow of affection for the opponent” (44). Rubbishing commanding officer or headmaster claptrap of the “boxing makes a man of you kind,” Scannell asserts rather that boxing permits a man “to behave in a way that is beyond and above his normal capacity. . . . He may be stupid, vain, ignorant, and brutish . . . but in the exercise of his art he becomes the embodiment of transcendental courage, strength and chivalry” (44). In other words, for Scannell, despite its neurotic components, boxing still enables, in an alluringly concentrated and aesthetic form, access to a heightened experience of the complexity and vitality of human life.

It is interesting to observe that over the last two decades, the challenge and excitement of boxing have been reappropriated not only by women but also, in the form of white-collar boxing, by middle-aged men. Initiated in Gleason’s Gym in New York in 1988, white-collar boxing has attained widespread popularity in the many major capitals of the Western world, in London and Dublin² as well as in American cities. Although boxing is traditionally viewed as a young man’s sport, not a few men continue after their mid-thirties an interest in the possibilities of boxing that goes beyond vicarious enjoyment of Olympic or world championship competitions. This is because boxing continues to hold a deep appeal for the masculine psyche, the charmed circle of the square ring exerting a fascination that for some can be exorcised only through a physical involvement within it. As we saw, the ring represents a theater in which a personal and physical challenge has to be met under the unrelenting gaze of one’s fellows in a situation of clarity and focus that is

perhaps more intense than in any other sport. As is commonly remarked, in the boxing ring there is nowhere to hide. For the older man with a strong interest in sport and an identity in part constructed around a certain sense of physical prowess, white-collar boxing offers the chance of reasserting a full and elegant command of the physical body in a testing situation, while for the professional woman it offers an alternative route to recognition in what is still a male-dominated world. As Robert Anasi remarks, “the recent entry of women and white collar workers into the sport demonstrates its essential attraction” (2002, 320).

TAYLOR FOULPROOF CUP

From the Minutes of the
NEW YORK BOXING COMMISSION
The TAYLOR Protector is hereby unanimously voted as proven
FOUL-PROOF beyond doubt, after severe tests by our two
official committees.
WM. MULDOON
(Signed)
JAMES A. FARLEY, Chairman
COL. PHELAN

July 1, 1930

Taylor Cup stops foul fighters from knocking the bread out of our mouths.
BERT STAND, Secretary, N. Y. Boxing Commission
N. Y. Evening World, July 16, 1930

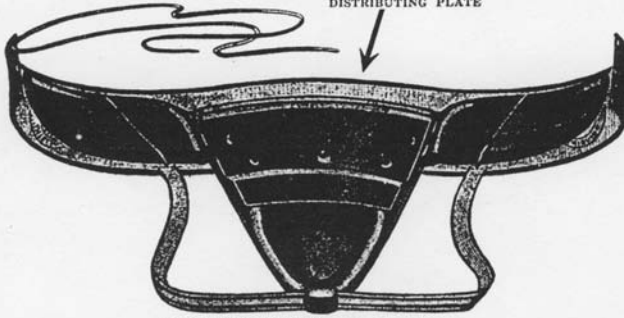
BROUGHT ABOUT NO FOUL RULE

Time is the test, no Taylor Cup fouls for 10 years!!!
Gymnasium agents wanted throughout the world. Write for terms.

DISTRIBUTING PLATE

4 inch
Belt Laced
in back for
Snug Fit

with
Upper
Groin
Distributing
Plate



Sanitary Rubber Catchpiece
Duraluminum Distributing Cup
Floats in Foam Rubber Throughout

\$8.50

No. 19
Foulproof
Cup
with
Hip
Protectors
and
Distributing
Plate

The Cup that is used by champions and top-notchers the world
over—

Joe Louis, Henry Armstrong, Lou Nova, Fred Apostoli,
Lou Ambers, Jock McAvoy, Tommy Farr and other great
fighting men have been using this cup ever since they
reached the top rung.

The only manufacturer making 3 actual different sizes
Small Size to 125 lbs., Medium Size to 160 lbs., Large Size over 160 lbs.

NO WET, SOGGY LEATHER COVERING

NONE GENUINE WITHOUT PATENT NUMBER 1,830,572
Send Money Order. Foreign, send International Draft.

FOULPROOF TAYLOR, Sole Maker
503 EAST FOURTH STREET Brooklyn, N. Y.

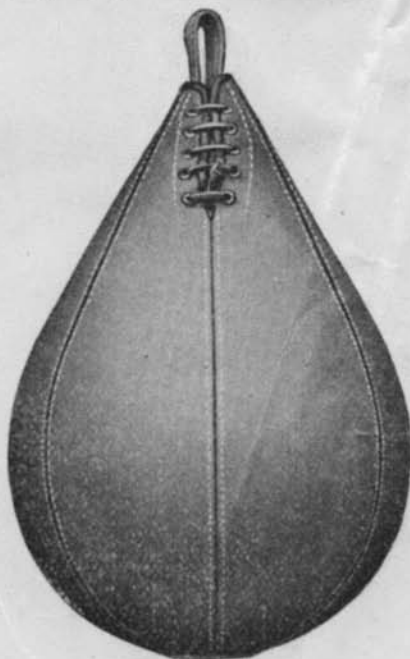
Figure 65. Taylor Foulproof Cup advertisement, 1930.

SPALDING

STRIKING BAGS

Prices quoted herein are those in force on Feb. 1st, 1923.

For latest prices, kindly call or write for Illustrated Catalogue, published twice annually.



No. 18.

Made from Super Tan Cape, lined twill, double stitched, red welted seams.

Price, 18/3

A. G. SPALDING & BROS., LTD.

**LONDON, BIRMINGHAM, LIVERPOOL, MANCHESTER,
LEEDS, BRISTOL, GLASGOW, EDINBURGH & PARIS.**

And of all Athletic Goods Dealers.

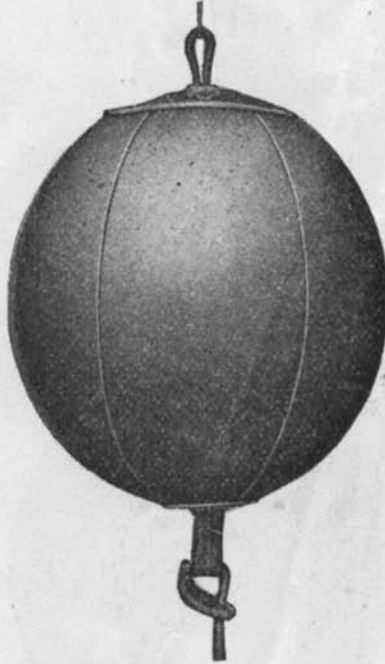
Figure 66. Spalding speed bag advertisement, 1923.

SPALDING

STRIKING BAGS

Prices quoted herein are those in force on Feb. 1st, 1923.

*For latest prices, kindly call or write for Illustrated
Catalogue, published twice annually.*



No. 7.

Best Green Chrome Cape, with elastic and
cord complete.

Price, 18/-.

A. G. SPALDING & BROS., LTD.

**LONDON, BIRMINGHAM, LIVERPOOL, MANCHESTER,
LEEDS, BRISTOL, GLASGOW, EDINBURGH & PARIS.**

And of all Athletic Goods Dealers.

Figure 67. Spalding double-ended bag advertisement, 1923.

SPALDING

BOXING BOOTS

Prices quoted herein are those in force on Feb. 1st, 1923.

For latest prices, kindly call or write for Illustrated Catalogue, published twice annually.



No. 21.

One of the
lightest boots
made.

Price,
21/- per pair.

No. 15.

A splendid boot
for training and
gymnasium
wear.

Price,
25/- per pair.



A. G. SPALDING & BROS., LTD.

LONDON, BIRMINGHAM, LIVERPOOL, MANCHESTER,
LEEDS, BRISTOL, GLASGOW, EDINBURGH & PARIS.

And of all Athletic Goods Dealers.

Figure 68. Spalding boxing boots advertisement, 1923.

SPALDING

BOXING GLOVES

Prices quoted herein are those in force on Feb. 1st, 1923.

*For latest prices, kindly call or write for Illustrated
Catalogue, published twice annually.*



"INTERNATIONAL."

Specially Selected Wine Colour Cape, with
white welting, bar grip, laced palm, padded
wrist, horsehair stuffed.

Price, 35/- per set.

A. G. SPALDING & BROS., LTD.

**LONDON, BIRMINGHAM, LIVERPOOL, MANCHESTER,
LEEDS, BRISTOL, GLASGOW, EDINBURGH & PARIS.**

And of all Athletic Goods Dealers.

Figure 69. Spalding boxing gloves advertisement, 1923.

Conclusion

Bruising is a kind of dumb play of the human crisis of identity in the modern society.

Gerald Early

Boxing is far from natural. It is a highly evolved combat sport. . . . The boxer must learn to continue reasoning when adrenaline and instinct are washing away his mind.

Robert Anasi

It takes constant effort to keep the slippery, naked, near-formless fact of hitting swaddled in layers of sense and form. Because hitting wants to shake off all encumbering import and just be hitting, because boxing incompletely frames elemental chaos, the capacity for the fights to mean is rivaled by their incapacity to mean anything at all.

Carlo Rotella

Boxing is a paradoxical sport, bringing together positive and negative—even pathological—tendencies. As we saw in the last chapter, the social aspect of boxing, with the deep questions it raises in relation to masculinity, identity, and racism, finds its fullest expression in American professional boxing as analyzed by Early, Oates, and others. The problematic of neurotic masculinity, what Early refers to as “the most metaphorical drama of male neurosis ever imagined in the modern bourgeois-dominated world” (1994, 10), is revealed in the tensions and violence that characterize the sport and the fascination it exerts on a public that finds itself, in today’s postindustrial

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world, further and further removed from the visceral reality of objects. The way this neurosis can be made meaningful in a positive sense, as a metaphor or lesson for life, has recently been interestingly explored by Carlo Rotella (2002, 2003), but, as the second epigraph to this chapter suggests, Rotella is far from underestimating the fineness of the line dividing boxing from chaos. The positive aspect of boxing—its promotion of fitness, friendship, and sportsmanship—seems to have been more consistently advocated by European writers, and more often in the context of amateur boxing, according to a model explored by Musil (1930), Scannell (1963), and others. Here the role of boxing is seen as that of taming violence, of freeing and glorifying atavistic impulses while it excites without brutalizing a mass audience. This aspect of the sport represents a positive model of masculinity in which in more recent times women as well as men are able to explore aggressive potentialities without losing dignity (Denfeld 1997; Sekules 2001). The English concept of sportsmanship, with its implications of stalwartness and decency, plays a significant part in this exploration of the positive aspects of a masculine ethos.

Through these two tendencies—neurotic masculinity and positive masculinity—boxing is also concerned to confront the real and the visceral whether encountered in social or physical terms. Here it is a question of interrogating the meaning of what it is to be a man in a modern, postindustrial society, and of exploring the strength, energy, and durability of the body. The eloquent exposition of the problematic aspects of boxing as social expression have tended, however, to make us lose sight of the positive aspect of the sport. For as a sport, boxing is also capable of deepening and celebrating human relations, especially between men, relations characterized (in particular at an amateur or club level) as much by friendship as by rivalry or hatred (figure 70). To a certain extent, boxing can become the purest expression of masculine friendship, implying mutual respect and knowledge, a desire better to understand the other, to test resistance, and in the process to understand oneself through the other. Viewed in this way, pleasure, excitement (or “buzz”), and a certain spirit of adventure make up part of the intrinsic charm of the sport.

An intermediary position between boxing’s two extremes—neurotic and life-enhancing—is convincingly argued by the American writer Robert Anasi

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in the wonderful record he produced of his experience as an aging participant in the American Golden Gloves amateur boxing competition in *The Gloves: A Boxing Chronicle* (2002). Anasi is deeply conscious of the paradoxes of boxing as a sport, its masochistic as well as its sadistic tendencies and the artificial or counterintuitive nature of the moves it requires. However in admitting that “a real boxer, he almost likes getting hit” (2002, 32), that “my own pain proved to be a remarkable stimulant” (33), that “I want to fight, I don’t want to fight, I want to fight, I don’t” (144), and that “boxing is a sport of endless doubt and labyrinthine self-deception” (230), Anasi never doubts the profound moral and physical benefits of the sport, arguing eloquently that “boxing can be an absolute experience, with extremes of intensity difficult to find in daily life. Boxing can swallow you up, subsume you into it . . . enormous, generative, essential, capable of absorbing any analogy and remaining selfsame. . . . It becomes life for those who enter it earlier enough and impossible to leave” (318).

These two tendencies, positive and negative, intrinsic to boxing, also, as it has been the aim of this book to show, find expression in artistic representations of the sport. On the positive side, from its origins in Greek antiquity, boxing has always been celebrated as a manifestation of the nobility and dignity as well as the strength and virility of the male body. This approach was taken up again by painters and caricaturists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when artists such as Rowlandson and Géricault were able to represent with new realism boxing at the moment of its rediscovery in the early modern era. This more recent tradition, in which the realist and the caricatural meet, was continued, as we saw in chapter 5, in the work of George Bellows and is also visible in other artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century period, for example, the early watercolors and pen and ink sketches of Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957).¹ It is also continued to the present day in the work of contemporary artists such as Sergei Chepik (b. 1953) and the ex-boxer Gary Dobry.

As the central chapters of my book argue, however, it was only with the emergence of avant-garde movements in the first quarter of the twentieth century that the ambiguity of boxing as a sport begins to be explored more analytically in painting and the visual arts. Here, two tendencies are noticeable: the first leads toward the formal analysis of boxing as both action and

practice whose forms, dynamics, and tensions have a wider significance in the domain of artistic representation and the social reality of the modern world; the second leads toward a deeper examination of the neurotic aspect of boxing in all its psychological and emotional tensions. On the level of formal analysis, it is in particular the avant-garde artistic movements at the beginning of the twentieth century—futurism, cubism, constructivism—which, as we saw in chapter 4, find in boxing an analogy for the energies and dynamisms operative in modern art. The work of the Japanese artist Ushio Shinohara continues to reflect such concerns in his performance work or “boxing painting” in which the artist creates giant mural paintings by dipping his boxing-gloved hands in paint. On the level of psychological analysis, the work of postmodern artists using installation, photomontage, or film (such as Rio Branco, Perrin, and Coleman) have succeeded in drawing our attention to and dramatizing the complex issues—unconscious and emotional—at stake in the boxing encounter.

Photography and cinema have of course in their own right contributed vitally to the heightening of the modern viewer’s awareness of the ultrarapid and instantaneous actions that are part of boxing and to the production of archetypal images expressing both the real and mythic dimensions of the sport, images that have established themselves in the public consciousness with extraordinary intensity. The whole area of boxing movies is of course a vast one, with such popular contemporary films as *Raging Bull* and the *Rocky* series merely marking the latest in a long Hollywood tradition.² Since, as Graeme Kent confirms in *Boxing Shorts*, “more films have been made about boxing than any other sport” (1992, 75), boxing and film is a topic requiring a book in itself to explore, Kent himself supplying a succinct filmography (75–78). Of particular interest in this field would be some of the early avant-garde cinematographic takes on boxing, which like the contemporary cubist and constructivist painting examined in chapter 4, are as much concerned with the aesthetics and dynamics of boxing as with the achievements of individual boxers. An outstanding example is that provided by the Belgian film director Charles Dekeukeleire, whose sophisticated image and graphic montage in such works as *Combat de boxe* of 1927 anticipates by three-quarters of a century today’s video or Eurosport-style presentational boxing sequences. The recent active participation of women in boxing has also had a

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positive impact on boxing cinematography, as we see with the films of Katya Bankowsky, (*Shadow Boxers*, 2000), Karyn Kusama (*Girlfight*, 2000), and even Clint Eastwood's Oscar-winning *Million-Dollar Baby* (2004), the latter based on an F. X. Toole story in *Rope Burns* (2000). Overall, the role of mediatization in the presentation and appreciation of boxing will become, as the work of Gursky suggests, a major aspect of future representations of the sport, one which in its real as well as its increasingly virtual form will continue to exert a profound fascination on modern consciousness, male and female.



Figure 70. Boxing Club, Trinity College Dublin.
From left to right: Alan Forde, David Scott, Ruaidhrí Breathnach, and Conor Galvin, 2004.
Courtesy Brendan J. Dempsey.

Notes

Introduction

1. The stresses and transformations wrought by the boxing encounter are nowhere more brilliantly recorded than in Robert Anasi's *The Gloves* (2002). In the following quotation, Anasi describes the complex emotions felt at an average sparring session in the gym: "When the bell buzzes, you smack leather with your partner by way of salute and begin to circle. You are boxing. A thousand times you've done this and still the tension, pressing and binding. Moments ago you were talking to a friend about work and telling jokes. Now . . . In the distortions of mouthpiece and headgear, your partner loses his human characteristics and becomes half monster" (8).

1. The Evolution of Boxing

1. The connection between masculine identity and public action in civic space is underlined by Monique Schneider in her book *Généalogie du masculin*, 13–15. Within the Greek ideal, the clothing of masculine nudity in defensive military apparel (in particular the shield and animal skin) offers a suggestive parallel to the apparel of the modern boxer, naked except for shorts and, above all, the leather (animal-skin) boxing gloves, which, as we shall see, are both a sign of aggression and a form of protection.
2. As Robert Anasi observes in American amateur boxing, "Above middleweight, the talent drop-off in boxing is considerable" (*The Gloves*, 318–19).
3. For an enthralling account of some of the ideological issues at stake in this memorable confrontation, see Norman Mailer, *The Fight*.

2. Boxing Apparel and the Legible Body

1. The full title of Godfrey's treatise is indicative of its new approach: *A Treatise Upon the Useful Science of Defense Connecting the Small and Back Sword with Some Observations on Boxing, and the Characters of the Most Able Boxers Within the Author's Time*. For a fuller account of its relevance and significance to early modern boxing, see Grombach, *Saga of the Fist*, 200–201.

NOTES

2. For further information on boxing rules, see Batchelor, *The Boxing Companion*, 70–73; Golesworthy, *Encyclopaedia of Boxing*; and McInnes, *Fighting Words*, in which are set out Broughton's rules (14–16), the London Prize Ring Rules (7–28), and the British Boxing Board of Control Rules (29–51). Comprehensive documentation on boxing rules, including the Marquess of Queensbury Rules (drafted 1865, officially adopted 1892) and the New York State Athletic Commission Rules (1975) is included by Grombach in *Saga of the Fist*.

3. The Ring and the Ropes

1. Elisabeth Badinter, in *xy*, argues convincingly that the dual potentiality of the male chromosome structure, which is *xy* rather than the female *xx*, means that masculine identity is much less assured than feminine. This realization has contributed to the current state of crisis in male identity, of which boxing provides a symptom.

4. The Ring as Theater of Modernist Action

1. For a convincing comparison of “simulacral” wrestling with boxing, see Rauch, *Boxe*, 241–60.
2. For an elaboration of this theory, see Boccioni (1913) in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, 92–95.
3. For a fuller account of the evolution of Balla's development of Boccioni's *Fist*, see Fagiolo, Balla, 108–13.
4. A complete exploration of the internal dynamic of the artist's page or canvas was of course made by the futurist's contemporary Wassily Kandinsky in *Point and Line to Plane*. For an analysis of the semiotic implications of this exploration, see Scott, “*Accord réciproque*,” 17–23.
5. This poster is reproduced in Mount, *Stenberg Brothers*.

5. Visual Tensions

1. The implications of this dynamism are worked out, as mentioned in chapter 4, by Kandinsky in *Point and Line to Plane*.
2. Similarly dramatic images of the boxing encounter were produced in the 1930s and 40s by the American artist Robert Riggs (1896–1970), as in the lithograph *On the Ropes* (1934), reproduced in Carey and Griffiths, *American Prints*, no. 114.

6. Mythical Confrontations

1. For an alternative reading of this work, see Fisher, “James Coleman's *Box*.”

7. Visual Metonymies

1. For a fuller account of boxing posters, see Scott, “*Métaphore et métonymie*.”

8. The Poetry of Boxing

1. For the 1924 Paris Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin (who had from 1896 reestablished the Olympic Games tradition in Europe) also promoted the organization under the presidency of the Marquis de Polignac of *Concours olympiques d'art* in which poets, sculptors, painters, and musicians submitted works for exhibition, performance, and evaluation. One of the award-winning works, by the poet Géo-Charles, consisted of a text evoking the match between the Olympic boxers Jean Royer (French champion) and Jim Harris (American champion). Part of this text, first published in *La Nouvelle Revue française* in Paris in 1925, resembles, in its association of traditional and modern, poet and boxer, Arthur Cravan's poetry. See Clastres, Dietschy, and Laget, *La France et l'olympisme*, 100.
2. For a fuller account of Cravan's boxing exploits and what they imply, see also Conover, *Arthur Cravan*.

9. Boxing and Modern Masculinity

1. For a succinct summary of Sartre's argument, see Aronson, “Boxing and Incarnation.”
2. An important part of the appeal of white-collar boxing—that is, regulated three-round contests between older men or women wearing protective headgear and sixteen-ounce gloves—is its authenticity: although matches are not usually longer than three two-minute rounds, and all the standard health and safety precautions taken for amateur boxing apply, participants nonetheless experience a real fight situation.

Conclusion

1. See Waddington, Jack B. Yeats, nos. 46, 47, 48, 54, 55, and 56.
2. For an illuminating account of this tradition's ultimate “failure to recover authenticity,” see Mellor, “Ring of Impossibility,” and James, “Raging Bulls.”

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